

ROBERT BROWNING'S WORKS

CENTENARY EDITION

IN TEN VOLUMES

VOLUME II



*Robert Browning
Rome, March 28, '59*

Emery Walker Ph. Sc.

*Robert Browning
(aged 46)*

*From the drawing, by Lord Leighton, 1859,
in the possession of R. Barrett Browning*

THE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
F. G. KENYON, C.B., D.LITT.

VOLUME II—STRAFFORD—
PIPPA PASSES—KING VICTOR
AND KING CHARLES—THE
RETURN OF THE DRUSES—A
BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON—
COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY



ERNEST BENN LIMITED
LONDON

First published 1912 by Smith Elder & Company

*This edition published by Ernest Benn Limited
Bouverie House • Fleet Street • London • EC4*

Reprinted by Permission of John Murray (Publishers) Ltd., London

Printed in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

STRAFFORD

Strafford, Browning's first drama written for the stage, was an interlude between the commencement and the completion of *Sordello*. It was the outcome of the memorable evening, already alluded to in the introduction to *Paracelsus*, of the supper at Serjeant Talfourd's house on May 26, 1836, in honour of the first night of *Ion*. As the party was breaking up, Macready (who had in the previous February welcomed the idea of a tragedy by Browning on the subject of Narses) turned to the young poet and said, "Write a play, Browning, and keep me from going to America." According to one version of the story, Browning at once suggested the subject of *Strafford*; but in the following August Macready in his diary speaks as though the precise subject had then been named to him for the first time. It was natural that it should occur to Browning, since about six months earlier he had been helping his friend John Forster with a *Life of Strafford*, which the latter had undertaken to produce by a certain date, and was prevented by illness from completing. By March, 1837,

INTRODUCTION

the play was in Macready's hands, and had been accepted by Osbaldistone, the manager of Covent Garden ; and on the following May Day it was produced.

The occasion was Macready's benefit, and the house was full of his friends ; but the success of the play trembled in the balance. Vandenhoff, who acted the important part of Pym, was careless and slovenly ; the King Charles of Mr. Dale was atrocious ; the manager, on the point of bankruptcy, had been extremely parsimonious in dresses and scenery ; but the fine poetry of the play, its occasional dramatic situations (as at the end of the third act), the great acting of Macready and the charms of the young Helen Faucit carried it through to triumph. The reviews of the critics were decidedly complimentary, and for five nights (Browning himself being in the pit on the second night) the play ran with much popular approbation. Then the abrupt withdrawal of Vandenhoff, who had received a more attractive offer of employment elsewhere, caused the suspension of the run. A melodrama, previously in rehearsal, was substituted for it, and in a few weeks the theatre closed its doors.

Strafford was published by Messrs. Longman simultaneously with its appearance on the stage, but (in spite of a temporary intention in 1842 to include it in the series of *Bells and Pomegranates*) did not appear again in print until it was included in the three-volume collected works of 1863. In 1861 Mrs. Browning spoke of it as "his poorest

INTRODUCTION

work of all." Nevertheless at the time—a time when England was poor in vigorous and original literature—it strengthened his position among the rising poets of the day, and widened his reputation among those who were capable of judging.

Browning's original preface is worth reprinting, as showing his own point of view at the time :

"I had for some time been engaged in a poem of a very different nature [*Sordello*], when induced to make the present attempt; and am not without apprehension that my eagerness to freshen a jaded mind by diverting it to the healthy natures of a grand epoch, may have operated unfavourably on the represented play, which is one of Action in Character rather than Character in Action. To remedy this, in some degree, considerable curtailment will be necessary, and, in a few instances, the supplying details not required, I suppose, by the mere reader. While a trifling success would much gratify, failure will not wholly discourage me from another effort: experience is to come, and earnest endeavour may yet remove many disadvantages.

"The portraits are, I think, faithful; and I am exceedingly fortunate in being able, in proof of this, to refer to the subtle and eloquent exposition of the characters of Eliot and Strafford, in the *Lives of Eminent British Statesmen* now in the course of publication in Lardner's *Cyclopaedia*, by a writer whom I am proud to call my friend; and whose biographies of Hampden, Pym, and Vane, will, I am sure, fitly illustrate the present year—the Second Centenary of the

INTRODUCTION

Trial concerning Ship-Money. My Carlisle, however, is purely imaginary : I at first sketched her singular likeness roughly in, as suggested by Matthew and the memoir-writers—but it was too artificial, and the substituted outline is exclusively from Voiture and Waller.

“The Italian boat-song in the last scene is from Redi’s *Bacco*, long since naturalized in the joyous and delicate version of Leigh Hunt.”

In an introduction prefixed to an annotated edition of *Strafford* (by Miss E. H. Hickey) published in 1884, Prof. S. R. Gardiner sums up with decisive authority the relation of Browning’s tragedy to the truth of history :

“Only here and there does anything in the course of the drama take place as it could have taken place at the actual court of Charles I. Not merely are there frequent minor inaccuracies, but the very roots of the situation are untrue to fact. The real Strafford was far from opposing the war with the Scots at the time when the Short Parliament was summoned. Pym never had such a friendship for Strafford as he is represented as having. . . . We have still to ask, how far the impression [of the principal characters] is a true one. For myself, I can only say that, every time that I read the play, I feel more certain that Mr. Browning has seized the real Strafford, the man of critical brain, of rapid decision, and tender heart, who strove for the good of his nation without sympathy for the generation in which he lived. Charles too, with his faults perhaps exaggerated, is nevertheless

INTRODUCTION

the real Charles. Of Lady Carlisle we know too little to speak with anything like certainty, but, in spite of Mr. Browning's statement that his character of her is purely imaginary, there is a wonderful parallelism between the Lady Carlisle of the play and the less noble Lady Carlisle which history conjectures rather than describes. There is the same tendency to fix the heart upon the truly great man, and to labour for him without the requital of human affection, though in the play no part is played by that vanity which seems to have been the main motive with the real personage. On the other hand, Pym is the most unsatisfactory, from a historical point of view, of the leading personages."

This is high praise; for it is the dramatist's function to display truth of character, not accuracy of historical detail.

PIPPA PASSES

At the date (March, 1840) when *Sordello* was published, Browning was already busy on "some plays," and had progressed so far that their production had already been heralded by advertisement (*R. Browning and A. Domett*, p. 29). The three plays so advertised as nearly ready were *Pippa Passes*, *King Victor and King Charles*, and *Mansoor the Hierophant* (subsequently renamed *The Return of the Druses*); and not only these, but also *A Blot in the*

INTRODUCTION

'*Scutcheon* had been completed before the end of 1840. But this amazing fertility of composition was met by a blank difficulty of publication. Macready was unwilling to accept either of the two plays offered to him; publishers were probably shy of another work by the author of *Sordello*. Under these circumstances, Browning was only too glad to close with a suggestion made by Mr. Edward Moxon (the husband of Lamb's Emma Isola, and himself a poet as well as a publisher) that he should print his plays in an inexpensive manner, namely in pamphlets of sixteen pages, with double columns of small type. In this way was begun the famous series of *Bells and Pomegranates*, by which means Browning's poetical work was given to the world from 1841 until the date of his marriage in 1846. (See Gosse, *Robert Browning: Personalia*, 1892, p. 52.)

The title of the series was thus explained by Browning in a letter to Miss Barrett (*Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, i. 250): "The Rabbis make Bells and Pomegranates symbolical of pleasure and profit, the grave and the gay, the poetry and the prose, singing and sermonizing—such a mixture of effects as in the original hour (that is, quarter of an hour) of confidence and creation, I meant the whole should prove at last." A much less lucid version of the same explanation was affixed (at Miss Barrett's earnest entreaty) to the final number of the series.

INTRODUCTION

The eight parts of *Bells and Pomegranates* were as follows :—

- I. Pippa Passes (1841).
- II. King Victor and King Charles (1842).
- III. Dramatic Lyrics (1842).
- IV. The Return of the Druses (1843).
- V. A Blot in the 'Scutcheon (1843).
- VI. Colombe's Birthday (1844).
- VII. Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845).
- VIII. Luria, and A Soul's Tragedy (1846).

The first part was published at sixpence, parts ii.—vi. at a shilling each, part vii. at two shillings, and part viii. (by which time the number of pages had increased to thirty-two) at half a crown. On the title-page of each part the poet is described as “author of *Paracelsus*,” without reference to the more recent *Sordello*.

The origin of *Pippa Passes* is thus described by Mrs. Orr (*Handbook to Robert Browning's Works*, 1892, p. 55), obviously on information derived from the poet himself: “Mr. Browning was walking alone, in a wood near Dulwich [Dulwich was a favourite walk from his home in Camberwell], when the image flashed upon him of some one walking thus alone through life; one apparently too obscure to leave a trace of his or her passage, yet exercising a lasting though unconscious influence at every step of it; and the image shaped itself into the little silk winder of Asolo, Felippa, or Pippa.”

The setting for the idea thus imagined was provided by his Italian tour of 1838, when he

INTRODUCTION

had visited Asolo, to which he refers in the last lines of *Sordello*. The poem, with its beautiful simplicity, directness and charm, must have been written in a reaction from the concentrated brain-work of *Sordello*, and was ready, as shown above, by the time the latter was printed. Accordingly, it led the way in the series of *Bells and Pomegranates*. Its inconspicuous form was probably responsible for the smallness of the impression made by it. Miss Barrett, however, had read it before making the acquaintance of the author, and, while not regarding it as his finest work, told him that she could find it in her heart to covet the authorship of it, more than any of his other works (*Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, i. 22, 24); while the poet himself, in reply, owned that he liked it better than anything else he had done yet. A hostile review called forth a vigorous protest in verse by Domett (*R. Browning and A. Domett*, p. 20); but the general response was in no way commensurate with the beauty of the poem, and it does not seem to have had any effect in rescuing the poet's reputation from the blight of *Sordello*.

The poem in its original form varied considerably from that in which it appears here. It was extensively revised for the collected *Poems* of 1849, and gained considerably in the process. The earlier form may be seen in the reprint of *Bells and Pomegranates*, published by Messrs. Ward, Lock, & Co. in 1896; and the more important variations are quoted in Nicoll and

INTRODUCTION

Wise's *Literary Anecdotes of the Nineteenth Century*, i. 508-12. The song, *A King Lived Long Ago* (Part III, ll. 164-222), is an amended version of a poem which Browning had contributed to W. J. Fox's *Monthly Repository* in 1835.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

The second part of *Bells and Pomegranates*, containing this play, was published early in 1842. The tragedy is one of the two which, in a letter to Miss Haworth written about August 1837 (Mrs. Orr's *Life*, 1908, pp. 96, 97), Browning mentions that he already had in his head, and when *Sordello* was published in 1840, it was announced as nearly ready. It was written for the stage, but was declined by Macready, and was consequently still in the author's desk when the series of *Bells and Pomegranates* was commenced. It was subsequently reprinted in all the collected editions of his works, but has never been acted, at any rate on the regular stage.

The drama represents an episode in the history of Sardinia in the eighteenth century. Victor Amadeus II. of Savoy, who became king of Sicily in 1713, was forced by the Quadruple Alliance in 1720 to take the kingdom of Sardinia in place of Sicily. In 1730, at the age of sixty-four, he suddenly abdicated in favour of his son, Charles Emmanuel III. The true cause is uncertain; it may have been weariness, combined with the

INTRODUCTION

desire to validate his marriage with a lady of the court ; it may have been, as Browning represents it, a device to evade the political difficulties in which he was involved. He retired in the first instance to Chambéry, but soon returned to Turin, and presently began to intrigue for the recovery of the crown. Charles, after much hesitation, was ultimately persuaded to put him under arrest. The final scene in the play is not historical ; in fact Victor lived under surveillance for another year, dying in 1732. Charles continued to reign until 1773. Browning's preface sets out his authorities, and his claim to have followed faithfully the inner historic truth of the interplay of the four characters who constitute the *dramatis personae*. For the latest narration of the historical events see *The Romance of Savoy*, by Marchesa Vitelleschi (1905), vol. ii. pp. 497-550.

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

In the sequence of the parts of *Bells and Pomegranates*, this was separated from *King Victor and King Charles* by the *Dramatic Lyrics*, which constituted part iii. This was due to the suggestion of the publisher, who thought it better to break the series of dramas by a group of shorter and more popular poems (*R. Browning and A. Domett*, p. 36). Otherwise *The Return of the Druses* would have followed closely in publication the play which it followed closely

INTRODUCTION

in conception and composition. In the letter to Miss Haworth, referred to in the introduction to *King Victor and King Charles*, Browning describes himself as in search of "a subject of the most wild and passionate love"; and by the time of the publication of *Sordello* this subject had been found, and had materialized into the present play, which, under its first title of *Mansoor the Hierophant*, was then advertised as nearly ready. In 1879 Browning wrote to Mr. Gosse with regard to this title: "Mansoor was one of the names of the third Vatemite Caliph, Biamrallah, but the word 'Hierophant' was used inadvertently. I changed the title to *The Return of the Druses*, and the name to 'Djabal'" (Nicoll and Wise, *Literary Anecdotes*, i. 368). With this changed title, having failed of acceptance for the stage by Macready in 1840, it formed part iv. of *Bells and Pomegranates*, and was published at the beginning of 1843.

The drama explains itself. The incidents are purely imaginary, with no historical basis. The Druses, who still inhabit Mount Lebanon, derive their religious belief from Hakeem Biamrillah, the 6th Fatimite Caliph and the third to rule in Egypt, in the eleventh century, who claimed to be an incarnation of God. The principal character in the play, Djabal, persuades others, notably the girl Anael, that he is a re-incarnation of God, a new Hakeem, in order that he may lead the Druses, who, in an island of the Aegean Sea, are oppressed by a tyrannous Grand Master

INTRODUCTION

of the Knights Hospitallers, in a revolt against their oppressor, and bring them back to Lebanon. This imaginary history is of importance only as a setting for a drama of acute human emotion, —of deception for a patriotic end, of exaltation amounting for a moment to self-deception, of disillusionment, of hopes baffled even in their accomplishment, on the part of Djabal, of utter and ecstatic devotion on the part of Anael. In no other play has Browning tried to depict emotional passion at such a height; and though Macready was no doubt right in not bringing it to the test of the stage, it is a poetical and romantic drama which will not lack readers.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

From the biographical point of view, this is the most important of all Browning's dramas. The date of its composition is fixed by a letter from Browning to Macready, published by Mr. T. J. Wise with the conjectural date "circa 1843," but shown by Mr. Hall Griffin to belong to 1840, being dated from Hanover Cottage, Browning's Camberwell home, which he left in December of that year; and it was the third play to be offered to Macready within the year. Macready (then at the Haymarket), after some delay, accepted it, intending to produce it at Drury Lane, of which he undertook the management in December, 1841. A long delay intervened,

INTRODUCTION

increased by the unexpected failure of a play on which the manager had built high hopes, and the consequent closing of the theatre from May to October. The fact was that, as in the case of *Strafford*, Macready became less enthusiastic about the play as time drew on. He consulted Forster, who consulted Dickens; and Dickens wrote ecstatically in its favour, as "full of genius, natural and great thoughts, profound and yet simple and beautiful in its vigour . . . a tragedy that *must* be played." At last Macready, in accordance with his promise to Browning, put the play into rehearsal. Hints were not spared that it would be better to withdraw it, but Browning wholly misunderstood them. Then Macready intimated that he should be unable to play in it himself. Still Browning did not perceive the deduction which was intended, and believed that he was meeting Macready's wishes by accepting Phelps as his substitute. The story has been told at least thrice in considerable detail,—by Joseph Arnould in a contemporary letter to Domett (*R. Browning and A. Domett*, pp. 62-67), by Browning himself, forty-one years afterwards, in a letter to Mr. Hill of the *Daily News* (*Mrs. Orr's Life*, 1908, pp. 110-114), and by Mr. Gosse with much picturesque detail in his *Personalia*: how, Phelps being ill, Macready took the part again in rehearsal; how he presently intimated that he was prepared to act it on the first night; how, on becoming aware of Phelps' disappoint-

INTRODUCTION

ment, Browning declared himself quite willing to leave the part in his hands; how Macready was mortally offended, and did all that he could to invite failure; how on the first night (Feb. 11, 1843), with Phelps and Helen Faucit in the principal parts, the play was received with much applause; and how, after two further performances to almost empty houses, it was withdrawn.

To Browning, both personally and as a poet, the misunderstanding was disastrous. It cost him the friendship of Macready; it wrecked the chances of the play which, of all that he ever wrote, had the best prospect of success on the stage. Further, for some unknown reason, Forster did not communicate to Browning (as he was authorized to do) the very favourable opinion of Dickens; it was not until he published it in his *Life of Dickens* that Browning heard of it, when he not unnaturally felt sore that he had been deprived of a testimonial which might have carried much weight with the public at a time when he needed such help.

In order to defeat an attempt made by Macready to rewrite portions of the play (especially the ending, where he wished to convert Tresham's suicide into a retirement to a monastery), Browning had it hastily printed and issued as part v. of *Bells and Pomegranates*, following *The Return of the Druses* at an interval of only a few weeks. It went into a second edition in the course of the same year. In 1848, when

INTRODUCTION

Browning was in Italy, the play was revived by Phelps at Sadler's Wells with "complete success," as Mrs. Browning was assured by Mr. Chorley of the *Athenæum*. A later performance, organized by the Browning Society in 1888, with Miss Alma Murray in the part of Mildred, also deserves mention.

Helen Faucit's account of the first performance is given in *Blackwood's Magazine*, 1881, p. 326.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

In spite of the ill success of Browning's two acted plays, *Strafford* and *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, it is evident that Macready was not the only actor-manager who believed him capable of producing a drama suitable for the stage. In 1845 Browning recalled the fact that Charles Kean had offered to give him £500 for any play that might suit him (*Letters of R. Browning and E. B. Barrett*, i. 200); and it was presumably on the strength of this encouragement that he wrote *Colombe's Birthday*. It must have been taken in hand shortly after the production of *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, for in May, 1843, Browning writes to Domett (*R. Browning and A. Domett*, p. 55) that he "must make up his mind to finish a play I wrote lately for Charles Kean, if he will have it. (Macready has used me vilely.)" But again delays intervened, and

INTRODUCTION

again the result was a disagreement between poet and actor. In March, 1844, Browning read his play to Kean, who expressed himself as fully satisfied with it, but wished to keep it, unproduced and unpublished, until Easter in the following year. Browning regarded the delay as unreasonable, and the excuses given as illusory: "This engagement at the Haymarket, next May, is merely for twelve nights, he says. He leaves London for Scotland tomorrow, or next day, and will be occupied for ten hours a day till he returns. My play will take him at least two months to study, he being a special slow-head. . . . It certainly never entered into my mind that anybody, even an actor, could need a couple of months to study a part, only, in a piece, which I could match with such another in less time by a good deal" (Letter to C. Dowson, printed in Wise's *Letters from Robert Browning to Various Correspondents*, 1895, i. 8). The last remark throws an interesting light on Browning's rate of composition, and explains the rapid production noticed in the introduction to *Pippa Passes*.

Browning was by this time in a state of soreness against all actors ("the poorest man of letters I ever knew is of far higher talent than the best actor I ever expect to know," *ibid.*, p. 10), and he thought it important to keep himself before the public. His words are interesting, since they show that the series of *Bells and Pomegranates* had been gradually

INTRODUCTION

working their way into favour, and regaining the ground lost by *Sordello*. "Something I must print, or risk the hold, such as it is, I have at present on my public . . . and two or three hundred pounds will pay me but indifferently for hazarding the good fortune which appears slowly but not mistakably setting in upon me thus now" (*ibid.*, p. 9). Accordingly, no other work being at the moment ready for production, *Colombe's Birthday* was at once sent to the printers, and appeared as part vi. of *Bells and Pomegranates*, probably within the next few weeks. The bargain with Kean thereupon, of course, fell through; and to this was added a breach with Forster, whose review of the printed play (*Examiner*, June 22, 1844) ended with the words "we abominate his [the author's] tastes as much as we respect his genius."

Colombe's Birthday was, however, acted, though not until nine years later. In April, 1853, it was produced by Phelps and Miss Faucit at the Haymarket, with a success (due mainly, according to the reports sent to the Brownings in Italy, to Miss Faucit's acting) which was gratifying to the author, though nothing in the nature of a run was achieved. In 1885 it was revived by the Browning Society, with Miss Alma Murray as the heroine.

The duchies of Juliers and Cleves had a historical existence, being united in 1521, and maintaining a sometimes precarious independence until their final absorption by Prussia

INTRODUCTION

in 1815; but the plot of the play is wholly imaginary.

The motto prefixed to it is from the poems of Sir John Hanmer, for whom Browning had a personal affection which extended to his verses.

The autograph manuscript of *Colombe's Birthday* is in the possession of Mr. H. Buxton Forman, who purchased it at a sale in 1877. Its previous history is given in a letter to him from Browning, on hearing of the purchase (Wise, *Letters of R. Browning*, i. 55; see also *Athenæum*, Sept. 1 and 15, 1894). It was made for Kean, on the occasion of the reading above-mentioned, and was the copy sent to the printer. "When it came back from the printer, my father caused the MS. to be bound, and I have no notion how it passed out of his or my possession. It is the single poem in the series [of *Bells and Pomegranates*] that I copied with my own hand, my sister being my amanuensis in those days."

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	v
STRAFFORD: A TRAGEDY	i
DEDICATION	3
ACT I.	
SCENE I. A HOUSE NEAR WHITEHALL	5
,, II. WHITEHALL	15
ACT II.	
SCENE I. A HOUSE NEAR WHITEHALL	27
,, II. WHITEHALL	31
ACT III.	
SCENE I. OPPOSITE WESTMINSTER HALL	44
,, II. WHITEHALL	46
,, III. THE ANTECHAMBER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS	56
ACT IV.	
SCENE I. WHITEHALL	62
,, II. A PASSAGE ADJOINING WESTMINSTER HALL	68
,, III. WHITEHALL	76
ACT V.	
SCENE I. WHITEHALL	80
,, II. THE TOWER	81

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PIPPA PASSES: A DRAMA	95
DEDICATION	97
INTRODUCTION	99
PART I. MORNING	106
„ II. NOON	122
„ III. EVENING	136
„ IV. NIGHT	147
KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES: A TRAGEDY	159
NOTE	161
FIRST YEAR, 1730—	
KING VICTOR. PART I.	163
KING VICTOR. PART II.	175
SECOND YEAR, 1731—	
KING CHARLES. PART I.	196
KING CHARLES. PART II.	212
THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES: A TRAGEDY .	227
ACT I.	229
„ II.	243
„ III.	257
„ IV.	269
„ V.	281
A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON: A TRAGEDY .	297
ACT I.	
SCENE I. THE INTERIOR OF A LODGE IN LORD	
TRESHAM'S PARK	299
„ II. A SALOON IN THE MANSION	303
„ III. MILDRED'S CHAMBER	310
ACT II.	
SCENE. THE LIBRARY	319

CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACT III.	
SCENE I. THE END OF THE YEW-TREE AVENUE UNDER MILDRED'S WINDOW	336
,, II. MILDRED'S CHAMBER	344
COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY: A PLAY	351
DEDICATION	353
ACT I. MORNING.	
SCENE. A CORRIDOR LEADING TO THE AUDIENCE CHAMBER	355
ACT II. NOON.	
SCENE. THE PRESENCE CHAMBER	369
ACT III. AFTERNOON.	
SCENE. THE VESTIBULE	383
ACT IV. EVENING.	
SCENE. AN ANTECHAMBER	398
ACT V. NIGHT.	
SCENE. THE HALL	414

PORTRAIT

ROBERT BROWNING (AGED 46)

*From the drawing by Lord Leighton, 1859, in the possession
of R. Barrett Browning* FRONTISPIECE

STRAFFORD

A TRAGEDY

VOL. II

A

DEDICATED IN ALL AFFECTIONATE ADMIRATION

TO

WILLIAM C. MACREADY

LONDON : *April* 23, 1837.

PERSONS

CHARLES I

Earl of HOLLAND

Lord SAVILE

Sir HENRY VANE

WENTWORTH, Viscount WENTWORTH, Earl of
STRAFFORD

JOHN PYM

JOHN HAMPDEN

The younger VANE

DENZIL HOLLIS

BENJAMIN RUDYARD

NATHANIEL FIENNES

Earl of LOUDON

MAXWELL, *Usher of the Black Rod*

BALFOUR, *Constable of the Tower*

A Puritan

Queen HENRIETTA

LUCY PERCY, Countess of CARLISLE

*Presbyterians, Scots Commissioners, Adherents of Strafford,
Secretaries, Officers of the Court, &c. Two of Strafford's children*



STRAFFORD

1837

ACT I

SCENE I.—*A House near Whitehall*

HAMPDEN, HOLLIS, *the younger VANE*, RUDYARD,
FIENNES *and many of the Presbyterian Party*:
LOUDON *and other Scots Commissioners*

Vane. I say, if he be here—

Rudyard. (And he is here!)—

Hollis. For England's sake let every man be
still

Nor speak of him, so much as say his name,
Till Pym rejoin us! Rudyard! Henry Vane!
One rash conclusion may decide our course 5
And with it England's fate—think—England's fate!
Hampden, for England's sake they should be still!

Vane. You say so, Hollis? Well, I must be still.

It is indeed too bitter that one man,
Any one man's mere presence, should suspend 10
England's combined endeavour: little need
To name him!

Rudyard. For you are his brother, Hollis!

Hampden. Shame on you, Rudyard! time to
tell him that,

When he forgets the Mother of us all.

Rudyard. Do I forget her?

Hampden. You talk idle hate 15
Against her foe : is that so strange a thing ?
Is hating Wentworth all the help she needs ?

A Puritan. The Philistine strode, cursing as
he went :
But David—five smooth pebbles from the brook
Within his scrip . . .

Rudyard. Be you as still as David ! 20

Fiennes. Here 's Rudyard not ashamed to wag
a tongue

Stiff with ten years' disuse of Parliaments ;
Why, when the last sat, Wentworth sat with us !

Rudyard. Let 's hope for news of them now he
returns—

He that was safe in Ireland, as we thought ! 25
—But I 'll abide Pym's coming.

Vane. Now, by Heaven,
Then may be cool who can, silent who will—
Some have a gift that way ! Wentworth is here,
Here, and the King 's safe closeted with him
Ere this. And when I think on all that 's past 30
Since that man left us, how his single arm
Rolled the advancing good of England back
And set the woeful past up in its place,
Exalting Dagon where the Ark should be,—
How that man has made firm the fickle King 35
(Hampden, I will speak out!)—in aught he feared
To venture on before ; taught tyranny
Her dismal trade, the use of all her tools,
To ply the scourge yet screw the gag so close
That strangled agony bleeds mute to death ; 40
How he turns Ireland to a private stage
For training infant villanies, new ways
Of wringing treasure out of tears and blood,
Unheard oppressions nourished in the dark
To try how much man's nature can endure 45

—If he dies under it, what harm? if not,
Why, one more trick is added to the rest
Worth a king's knowing, and what Ireland bears
England may learn to bear :—how all this while
That man has set himself to one dear task, 50
The bringing Charles to relish more and more
Power, power without law, power and blood too
—Can I be still?

Hampden. For that you should be still.

Vane. Oh Hampden, then and now! The year
he left us,
The People in full Parliament could wrest 55
The Bill of Rights from the reluctant King;
And now, he'll find in an obscure small room
A stealthy gathering of great-hearted men
That take up England's cause: England is here!

Hampden. And who despairs of England?

Rudyard. That do I, 60
If Wentworth comes to rule her. I am sick
To think her wretched masters, Hamilton,
The muckworm Cottington, the maniac Laud,
May yet be longed-for back again. I say,
I do despair.

Vane. And, Rudyard, I'll say this— 65
Which all true men say after me, not loud
But solemnly and as you'd say a prayer!
This King, who treads our England underfoot,
Has just so much . . . it may be fear or craft,
As bids him pause at each fresh outrage; friends, 70
He needs some sterner hand to grasp his own,
Some voice to ask, "Why shrink? Am I not by?"
Now, one whom England loved for serving her,
Found in his heart to say, "I know where best
"The iron heel shall bruise her, for she leans 75
"Upon me when you trample." Witness, you!
So Wentworth heartened Charles, so England fell.

But inasmuch as life is hard to take
From England . . .

Many Voices. Go on, Vane! 'T is well said,
Vane!

Vane. —Who has not so forgotten Runnymede!—

Voices. 'T is well and bravely spoken, Vane!
Go on!

Vane. —There are some little signs of late she knows

The ground no place for her. She glances round,
Wentworth has dropped the hand, is gone his way
On other service : what if she arise?

No! the King beckons, and beside him stands
The same bad man once more, with the same smile
And the same gesture. Now shall England crouch,
Or catch at us and rise?

Voices. The Renegade!

Haman! Ahithophel!

Hampden. Gentlemen of the North,
It was not thus the night your claims were urged,
And we pronounced the League and Covenant,
The cause of Scotland, England's cause as well :
Vane there, sat motionless the whole night through.

Vane. Hampden!

Fiennes. Stay, Vane!

Loudon. Be just and patient, Vane!

Vane. Mind how you counsel patience, Loudon!
you

Have still a Parliament, and this your League
To back it; you are free in Scotland still :
While we are brothers, hope 's for England yet.
But know you wherefore Wentworth comes? to
quench

This last of hopes? that he brings war with him?
Know you the man's self? what he dares?

Loudon. We know,
All know—'t is nothing new.

Vane. And what 's new, then,
In calling for his life? Why, Pym himself—
You must have heard—ere Wentworth dropped
our cause

105

He would see Pym first; there were many more
Strong on the people's side and friends of his,
Eliot that 's dead, Rudyard and Hampden here,
But for these Wentworth cared not; only, Pym
He would see—Pym and he were sworn, 't is
said,

110

To live and die together; so, they met
At Greenwich. Wentworth, you are sure, was long,
Specious enough, the devil's argument
Lost nothing on his lips; he 'd have Pym own
A patriot could not play a purer part
Than follow in his track; they two combined
Might put down England. Well, Pym heard him
out;

115

One glance—you know Pym's eye—one word was
all:

"You leave us, Wentworth! while your head is
on,

"I 'll not leave you."

Hampden. Has he left Wentworth, then? 120
Has England lost him? Will you let him speak,
Or put your crude surmises in his mouth?
Away with this! Will you have Pym or Vane?

Voices. Wait Pym's arrival! Pym shall speak.

Hampden. Meanwhile
Let Loudon read the Parliament's report 125
From Edinburgh: our last hope, as Vane says,
Is in the stand it makes. Loudon!

Vane. No, no!
Silent I can be: not indifferent!

Hampden. Then each keep silence, praying
God to spare
His anger, cast not England quite away 130
In this her visitation!

A Puritan. Seven years long
The Midianite drove Israel into dens
And caves. Till God sent forth a mighty man,

PYM enters

Even Gideon!

Pym. Wentworth's come: nor sickness, care,
The ravaged body nor the ruined soul, 135
More than the winds and waves that beat his ship,
Could keep him from the King. He has not
reached

Whitehall: they've hurried up a Council there
To lose no time and find him work enough.
Where's Loudon? your Scots' Parliament . . .

Loudon. Holds firm: 140

We were about to read reports.

Pym. The King
Has just dissolved your Parliament.

Loudon and other Scots. Great God!
An oath-breaker! Stand by us, England, then!

Pym. The King's too sanguine; doubtless
Wentworth's here;
But still some little form might be kept up. 145

Hampden. Now speak, Vane! Rudyard, you
had much to say!

Hollis. The rumour's false, then . . .

Pym. Ay, the Court gives out
His own concerns have brought him back: I know
'T is the King calls him. Wentworth supersedes
The tribe of Cottingtons and Hamiltons 150
Whose part is played; there's talk enough, by
this,—

Merciful talk, the King thinks : time is now
 To turn the record's last and bloody leaf
 Which, chronicling a nation's great despair,
 Tells they were long rebellious, and their lord 155
 Indulgent, till, all kind expedients tried,
 He drew the sword on them and reigned in peace.
 Laud's laying his religion on the Scots
 Was the last gentle entry : the new page
 Shall run, the King thinks, " Wentworth thrust it
 down 160

" At the sword's point."

A Puritan. I 'll do your bidding, Pym,
 England's and God's—one blow !

Pym. A goodly thing—
 We all say, friends, it is a goodly thing
 TorightthatEngland. Heavengrowsdark above :
 Let 's snatch one moment ere the thunder fall, 165
 To say how well the English spirit comes out
 Beneath it ! All have done their best, indeed,
 From lion Eliot, that grand Englishman,
 To the least here : and who, the least one here,
 When she is saved (for her redemption dawns 170
 Dimly, most dimly, but it dawns—it dawns)
 Who 'd give at any price his hope away
 Of being named along with the Great Men ?
 We would not—no, we would not give that up !

Hampden. And one name shall be dearer than
 all names. 175

When children, yet unborn, are taught that name
 Aftertheirfathers',—taught whatmatchlessman...

Pym. . . . Saved England ? What if Went-
 worth's should be still

That name ?

Rudyard and others. We have just said it, Pym !
 His death

Saves her ! We said it—there 's no way beside ! 180

I 'll do God's bidding, Pym ! They struck down
Joab

And purged the land.

Vane. No villanous striking-down !

Rudyard. No, a calm vengeance : let the whole
land rise

And shout for it. No Feltons !

Pym. Rudyard, no !

England rejects all Feltons ; most of all 185

Since Wentworth . . . Hampden, say the trust again

Of England in her servants—but I 'll think

You know me, all of you. Then, I believe,

Spite of the past, Wentworth rejoins you, friends !

Vane and others. Wentworth ? Apostate !

Judas ! Double-dyed 190

A traitor ! Is it Pym, indeed . . .

Pym. . . . Who says

Vane never knew that Wentworth, loved that man,

Was used to stroll with him, arm locked in arm,

Along the streets to see the people pass,

And read in every island-countenance 195

Fresh argument for God against the King,—

Never sat down, say, in the very house

Where Eliot's brow grew broad with noble thoughts,

(You've joined us, Hampden—Hollis, you as well,)

And then left talking over Gracchus' death . . . 200

Vane. To frame, we know it well, the choicest
clause

In the Petition of Right : he framed such clause

One month before he took at the King's hand

His Northern Presidency, which that Bill

Denounced.

Pym. Too true ! Never more, never more 205

Walked we together ! Most alone I went.

I have had friends—all here are fast my friends—

But I shall never quite forget that friend.

And yet it could not but be real in him !
You, Vane,—you, Rudyard, have no right to trust 210
To Wentworth : but can no one hope with me ?
Hampden, will Wentworth dare shed English blood
Like water ?

Hampden. Ireland is Aceldama.

Pym. Will he turn Scotland to a hunting-ground
To please the King, now that he knows the King ? 215
The People or the King ? and that King, Charles !

Hampden. Pym, all here know you : you 'll not
set your heart

On any baseless dream. But say one deed
Of Wentworth's since he left us . . .

[*Shouting without.*

Vane. There ! he comes,
And they shout for him ! Wentworth's at White-
hall, 220

The King embracing him, now, as we speak,
And he, to be his match in courtesies,
Taking the whole war's risk upon himself,
Now, while you tell us here how changed he is !
Hear you ?

Pym. And yet if 't is a dream, no more, 225
That Wentworth chose their side, and brought the
King

To love it as though Laud had loved it first,
And the Queen after ;—that he led their cause
Calm to success, and kept it spotless through,
So that our very eyes could look upon 230
The travail of our souls, and close content
That violence, which something mars even right
Which sanctions it, had taken off no grace
From its serene regard. Only a dream !

Hampden. We meet here to accomplish certain
good 235
By obvious means, and keep tradition up

Of free assemblages, else obsolete,
In this poor chamber : nor without effect
Has friend met friend to counsel and confirm,
As, listening to the beats of England's heart, 240
We spoke its wants to Scotland's prompt reply
By these her delegates. Remains alone
That word grow deed, as with God's help it shall—
But with the devil's hindrance, who doubts too?
Looked we or no that tyranny should turn 245
Her engines of oppression to their use?
Whereof, suppose the worst be Wentworth here—
Shall we break off the tactics which succeed
In drawing out our formidablest foe,
Let bickering and disunion take their place? 250
Or count his presence as our conquest's proof,
And keep the old arms at their steady play?
Proceed to England's work! Fiennes, read the list!

Fiennes. Ship-money is refused or fiercely paid
In every county, save the northern parts 255
Where Wentworth's influence . . . [*Shouting.*

Vane. I, in England's name,
Declare her work, this way, at end! Till now,
Up to this moment, peaceful strife was best.
We English had free leave to think; till now,
We had a shadow of a Parliament 260
In Scotland. But all's changed: they change the
first,

They try brute-force for law, they, first of all . . .

Voices. Good! Talk enough! The old true
hearts with Vane!

Vane. Till we crush Wentworth for her, there's
no act
Serves England!

Voices. Vane for England!

Pym. Pym should be 265
Something to England. I seek Wentworth, friends.

SCENE II.—*Whitehall*

Lady CARLISLE and WENTWORTH

Wentworth. And the King?*Lady Carlisle.* Wentworth, lean on me! Sit then!I'll tell you all; this horrible fatigue
Will kill you.*Wentworth.* No;—or, Lucy, just your arm;
I'll not sit till I've cleared this up with him: 270
After that, rest. The King?*Lady Carlisle.* Confides in you.*Wentworth.* Why? or, why now?—They have
kind throats, the knaves!
Shout for me—they!*Lady Carlisle.* You come so strangely soon:
Yet we took measures to keep off the crowd—
Did they shout for you?*Wentworth.* Wherefore should they not? 275
Does the King take such measures for himself?
Beside, there's such a dearth of malcontents,
You say!*Lady Carlisle.* I said but few dared carp at
you.*Wentworth.* At me? at us, I hope! The King
and IHe's surely not disposed to let me bear 280
The fame away from him of these late deeds
In Ireland? I am yet his instrument
Be it for well or ill? He trusts me, too!*Lady Carlisle.* The King, dear Wentworth, pur-
poses, I said,
To grant you, in the face of all the Court . . . 285

Wentworth. All the Court! Evermore the Court about us!

Savile and Holland, Hamilton and Vane
About us,—then the King will grant me—
what?

That he for once put these aside and say—
“Tell me your whole mind, *Wentworth*!”

Lady Carlisle. You professed 290
You would be calm.

Wentworth. Lucy, and I am calm!
How else shall I do all I come to do,
Broken, as you may see, body and mind,
How shall I serve the King? Time wastes mean-
while,

You have not told me half. His footstep! No. 295
Quick, then, before I meet him,—I am calm—
Why does the King distrust me?

Lady Carlisle. He does not
Distrust you.

Wentworth. Lucy, you can help me; you
Have even seemed to care for me: one word!
Is it the Queen?

Lady Carlisle. No, not the Queen: the party 300
That poisons the Queen's ear, Savile and Holland.

Wentworth. I know, I know: old Vane, too,
he's one too?

Go on—and he's made Secretary. Well?
Or leave them out and go straight to the charge—
The charge!

Lady Carlisle. Oh, there's no charge, no precise
charge; 305
Only they sneer, make light of—one may say,
Nibble at what you do.

Wentworth. I know! but Lucy,
I reckoned on you from the first!—Go on!
—Was sure could I once see this gentle friend

When I arrived, she 'd throw an hour away 310
To help her . . . what am I ?

Lady Carlisle. You thought of me,
Dear Wentworth ?

Wentworth. But go on ! The party here !

Lady Carlisle. They do not think your Irish
government
Of that surpassing value . . .

Wentworth. The one thing
Of value ! The one service that the crown 315
May count on ! All that keeps these very Vanes
In power, to vex me—not that they do vex,
Only it might vex some to hear that service
Decried, the sole support that 's left the King !

Lady Carlisle. So the Archbishop says.

Wentworth. Ah ? well, perhaps 320
The only hand held up in my defence
May be old Laud's ! These Hollands then, these
Saviles

Nibble ? They nibble ?—that 's the very word !

Lady Carlisle. Your profit in the Customs,
Bristol says,

Exceeds the due proportion : while the tax . . . 325

Wentworth. Enough ! 't is too unworthy,—I
am not

So patient as I thought. What 's Pym about ?

Lady Carlisle. Pym ?

Wentworth. Pym and the People.

Lady Carlisle. Oh, the Faction !

Extinct—of no account : there 'll never be
Another Parliament.

Wentworth. Tell Savile that ! 330
You may know—(ay, you do—the creatures
here

Never forget !) that in my earliest life
I was not . . . much that I am now ! The King

May take my word on points concerning Pym
Before Lord Savile's, Lucy, or if not, 335
I bid them ruin their wise selves, not me,
These Vanes and Hollands! I 'll not be their
tool

Who might be Pym's friend yet.

But there 's the King!

Where is he?

Lady Carlisle. Just apprised that you arrive.

Wentworth. And why not here to meet me?

I was told

340

He sent for me, nay, longed for me.

Lady Carlisle. Because,—

He is now . . . I think a Council 's sitting now
About this Scots affair.

Wentworth. A Council sits?

They have not taken a decided course

Without me in the matter?

Lady Carlisle. I should say . . . 345

Wentworth. The war? They cannot have
agreed to that?

Not the Scots' war?—without consulting me—

Me, that am here to show how rash it is,

How easy to dispense with?—Ah, you too

Against me! well,—the King may take his time. 350

—Forget it, Lucy! Cares make peevish: mine

Weigh me (but 't is a secret) to my grave.

Lady Carlisle. For life or death I am your own,
dear friend! [Goes out.

Wentworth. Heartless! but all are heartless
here. Go now,

Forsake the People!

I did not forsake

355

The People: they shall know it, when the King

Will trust me!—who trusts all beside at once,

While I have not spoke Vane and Savile fair,

And am not trusted : have but saved the throne :
 Have not picked up the Queen's glove prettily, 360
 And am not trusted. But he 'll see me now.
 Weston is dead : the Queen 's half English now—
 More English : one decisive word will brush
 These insects from . . . the step I know so well !
 The King ! But now, to tell him . . . no—to ask 365
 What 's in me he distrusts :—or, best begin
 By proving that this frightful Scots affair
 Is just what I foretold. So much to say,
 And the flesh fails, now, and the time is come,
 And one false step no way to be repaired. 370
 You were avenged, Pym, could you look on me.

PYM enters

Wentworth. I little thought of you just then.

Pym. No ? I

Think always of you, Wentworth.

Wentworth. The old voice !

I wait the King, sir.

Pym. True—you look so pale !

A Council sits within ; when that breaks up 375
 He 'll see you.

Wentworth. Sir, I thank you.

Pym. Oh, thank Laud !

You know when Laud once gets on Church affairs
 The case is desperate : he 'll not be long
 To-day : he only means to prove, to-day,
 We English all are mad to have a hand
 In butchering the Scots for serving God
 After their fathers' fashion : only that ! 380

Wentworth. Sir, keep your jests for those who
 relish them !

(Does he enjoy their confidence ?) 'T is kind
 To tell me what the Council does.

Pym. You grudge 385

That I should know it had resolved on war
Before you came? no need: you shall have all
The credit, trust me!

Wentworth. Have the Council dared—
They have not dared . . . that is—I know you not.
Farewell, sir: times are changed.

Pym. —Since we two met 390
At Greenwich? Yes: poor patriots though we be,
You cut a figure, makes some slight return
For your exploits in Ireland! Changed indeed,
Could our friend Eliot look from out his grave!
Ah Wentworth, one thing for acquaintance' sake, 395
Just to decide a question; have you, now,
Felt your old self since you forsook us?

Wentworth. Sir!

Pym. Spare me the gesture! you misapprehend.
Think not I mean the advantage is with me.
I was about to say that, for my part, 400
I never quite held up my head since then—
Was quite myself since then: for first, you see
I lost all credit after that event
With those who recollect how sure I was
Wentworth would outdo Eliot on our side. 405
Forgive me: Savile, old Vane, Holland here,
Eschew plain-speaking: 't is a trick I keep.

Wentworth. How, when, where, Savile, Vane,
and Holland speak,
Plainly or otherwise, would have my scorn,
All of my scorn, sir . . .

Pym. . . . Did not my poor thoughts 410
Claim somewhat?

Wentworth. Keep your thoughts! believe the
King

Mistrusts me for their prattle, all these Vanes
And Saviles! make your mind up, o' God's love,
That I am discontented with the King!

Pym. Why, you may be : I should be, that I
know, 415
Were I like you.

Wentworth. Like me ?

Pym. I care not much
For titles : our friend Eliot died no lord,
Hampden 's no lord, and Savile is a lord ;
But you care, since you sold your soul for one.
I can't think, therefore, your soul's purchaser 420
Did well to laugh you to such utter scorn
When you twice prayed so humbly for its price,
The thirty silver pieces . . . I should say,
The Earldom you expected, still expect,
And may. Your letters were the movingest ! 425
Console yourself : I 've borne him prayers just
now

From Scotland not to be oppressed by Laud,
Words moving in their way : he 'll pay, be sure,
As much attention as to those you sent.

Wentworth. False, sir ! Who showed them you ?

Suppose it so, 430
The King did very well . . . nay, I was glad
When it was shown me : I refused, the first !
John Pym, you were my friend—forbear me once !

Pym. Oh, Wentworth, ancient brother of my soul,
That all should come to this !

Wentworth. Leave me !

Pym. My friend, 435
Why should I leave you ?

Wentworth. To tell Rudyard this,
And Hampden this !

Pym. Whose faces once were bright
At my approach, now sad with doubt and fear,
Because I hope in you—yes, Wentworth, you
Who never mean to ruin England—you 440
Who shake off, with God's help, an obscene dream

In this Ezekiel chamber, where it crept
Upon you first, and wake, yourself, your true
And proper self, our Leader, England's Chief,
And Hampden's friend !

 This is the proudest day ! 445
Come, Wentworth ! Do not even see the King !
The rough old room will seem itself again !
We 'll both go in together : you 've not seen
Hampden so long : come : and there 's Fiennes :
 you 'll have

To know young Vane. This is the proudest day ! 450
 [*The KING enters. WENTWORTH lets fall*
 PYM's hand.

Charles. Arrived, my lord ?—This gentleman,
we know
Was your old friend.

 The Scots shall be informed
What we determine for their happiness.
 [*PYM goes out.*

You have made haste, my lord.

Wentworth. Sir, I am come . . .

Charles. To see an old familiar—nay, 't is well ; 455
Aid us with his experience : this Scots' League
And Covenant spreads too far, and we have proofs
That they intrigue with France : the Faction too,
Whereof your friend there is the head and front,
Abets them,—as he boasted, very like. 460

Wentworth. Sir, trust me ! but for this once,
trust me, sir !

Charles. What can you mean ?

Wentworth. That you should trust me, sir !
Oh—not for my sake ! but 't is sad, so sad
That for distrusting me, you suffer—you
Whom I would die to serve : sir, do you think 465
That I would die to serve you ?

Charles. But rise, Wentworth !

Wentworth. What shall convince you? What does Savile do

To prove him . . . Ah, one can't tear out one's heart

And show it, how sincere a thing it is!

Charles. Have I not trusted you?

Wentworth. Say aught but that! 470

There is my comfort, mark you: all will be

So different when you trust me—as you shall!

It has not been your fault,—I was away,

Mistook, maligned, how was the King to know?

I am here, now—he means to trust me, now— 475

All will go on so well!

Charles. Be sure I do—

I've heard that I should trust you: as you came,

Your friend, the Countess, told me . . .

Wentworth. No,—hear nothing—

Be told nothing about me!—you're not told

Your right-hand serves you, or your children love you! 480

Charles. You love me, Wentworth: rise!

Wentworth. I can speak now.

I have no right to hide the truth. 'T is I

Can save you: only I. Sir, what must be?

Charles. Since Laud's assured (the minutes are within)

—Loath as I am to spill my subjects' blood . . . 485

Wentworth. That is, he'll have a war: what's done is done!

Charles. They have intrigued with France; that's clear to Laud.

Wentworth. Has Laud suggested any way to meet

The war's expense?

Charles. He'd not decide so far

Until you joined us.

Wentworth. Most considerate ! 490
He 's certain they intrigue with France, these
Scots ?

The People would be with us.

Charles. Pym should know.

Wentworth. The People for us—were the People
for us !

Sir, a great thought comes to reward your trust :
Summon a Parliament ! in Ireland first, 495
Then, here.

Charles. In truth ?

Wentworth. That saves us ! that puts off
The war, gives time to right their grievances—
To talk with Pym. I know the Faction,—Laud
So styles it,—tutors Scotland : all their plans
Suppose no Parliament : in calling one 500
You take them by surprise. Produce the proofs
Of Scotland's treason ; then bid England help :
Even Pym will not refuse.

Charles. You would begin
With Ireland ?

Wentworth. Take no care for that: that 's sure
To prosper.

Charles. You shall rule me. You were best 505
Return at once : but take this ere you go !
Now, do I trust you ? You 're an Earl: my Friend
Of Friends : yes, while . . . You hear me
not !

Wentworth. Say it all o'er again—but once
again :
The first was for the music : once again ! 510

Charles. Strafford, my friend, there may have
been reports,
Vain rumours. Henceforth touching Strafford is
To touch the apple of my sight : why gaze
So earnestly ?

Wentworth. I am grown young again,
And foolish. What was it we spoke of?

Charles. Ireland, 515

The Parliament,—

Wentworth. I may go when I will?

—Now?

Charles. Are you tired so soon of us?

Wentworth. My King!

But you will not so utterly abhor
A Parliament? I'd serve you any way.

Charles. You said just now this was the only way. 520

Wentworth. Sir, I will serve you.

Charles. Strafford, spare yourself:

You are so sick, they tell me.

Wentworth. 'T is my soul

That's well and prospers now.

This Parliament—

We'll summon it, the English one—I'll care
For everything. You shall not need them much. 525

Charles. If they prove restive . . .

Wentworth. I shall be with you.

Charles. Ere they assemble?

Wentworth. I will come, or else

Deposit this infirm humanity

I'th dust. My whole heart stays with you, my King!

[*As WENTWORTH goes out, the QUEEN enters.*]

Charles. That man must love me.

Queen. Is it over then? 530

Why, he looks yellower than ever! Well,

At least we shall not hear eternally

Of service—services: he's paid at least.

Charles. Not done with: he engages to surpass
All yet performed in Ireland.

Queen. I had thought 535

Nothing beyond was ever to be done.

The war, Charles—will he raise supplies enough?

Charles. We've hit on an expedient; he . . . that is, I have advised . . . we have decided on The calling—in Ireland—of a Parliament. 540

Queen. O truly! You agree to that? Is that The first fruit of his counsel? But I guessed As much.

Charles. This is too idle, Henriette! I should know best. He will strain every nerve, And once a precedent established . . .

Queen. Notice 545
How sure he is of a long term of favour!
He'll see the next, and the next after that;
No end to Parliaments!

Charles. Well, it is done.
He talks it smoothly, doubtless. If, indeed,
The Commons here . . .

Queen. Here! you will summon them 550
Here? Would I were in France again to see
A King!

Charles. But, Henriette . . .

Queen. Oh, the Scots see clear!
Why should they bear your rule?

Charles. But listen, sweet!

Queen. Let Wentworth listen—you confide in him!

Charles. I do not, love,—I do not so confide! 555
The Parliament shall never trouble us
. . . Nay, hear me! I have schemes, such
schemes: we'll buy

The leaders off: without that, Wentworth's counsel
Had ne'er prevailed on me. Perhaps I call it
To have excuse for breaking it for ever, 560
And whose will then the blame be? See you not?
Come, dearest!—look, the little fairy, now,
That cannot reach my shoulder! Dearest, come!

ACT II

SCENE I.—(As in Act I Scene I)

The same Party enters

Rudyard. Twelve subsidies !

Vane. Oh Rudyard, do not laugh
At least !

Rudyard. True : Strafford called the Parliament—
'T is he should laugh !

A Puritan. Out of the serpent's root
Comes forth a cockatrice.

Fiennes. —A stinging one,
If that 's the Parliament : twelve subsidies ! 5
A stinging one ! but, brother, where 's your word
For Strafford's other nest-egg, the Scots' war ?

The Puritan. His fruit shall be a fiery flying
serpent.

Fiennes. Shall be ? It chips the shell, man ;
peeps abroad.
Twelve subsidies !—Why, how now, Vane ?

Rudyard. Peace, Fiennes ! 10

Fiennes. Ah ?—But he was not more a dupe than I,
Or you, or any here, the day that Pym
Returned with the good news. Look up, friend
Vane !

We all believed that Strafford meant us well
In summoning the Parliament.

HAMPDEN enters

Vane. Now, Hampden, 15
Clear me ! I would have leave to sleep again :

I 'd look the People in the face again :
 Clear me from having, from the first, hoped, dreamed
 Better of Strafford !

Hampden. You may grow one day
 A steadfast light to England, Henry Vane ! 20

Rudyard. Meantime, by flashes I make shift to
 see
 Strafford revived our Parliaments ; before,
 War was but talked of ; there 's an army, now :
 Still, we 've a Parliament ! Poor Ireland bears
 Another wrench (she dies the hardest death !)— 25
 Why, speak of it in Parliament ! and lo,
 'T is spoken, so console yourselves !

Fiennes. The jest !
 We clamoured, I suppose, thus long, to win
 The privilege of laying on our backs
 A sorer burden than the King dares lay ! 30

Rudyard. Mark now : we meet at length, com-
 plaints pour in
 From every county, all the land cries out
 On loans and levies, curses ship-money,
 Calls vengeance on the Star Chamber ; we lend
 An ear. " Ay, lend them all the ears you have ! " 35
 Puts in the King ; " my subjects, as you find,
 " Are fretful, and conceive great things of you.
 " Just listen to them, friends ; you 'll sanction me
 " The measures they most wince at, make them
 yours,
 " Instead of mine, I know : and, to begin, 40
 " They say my levies pinch them,—raise me straight
 " Twelve subsidies ! "

Fiennes. All England cannot furnish
 Twelve subsidies !

Hollis. But Strafford, just returned
 From Ireland—what has he to do with that ?
 How could he speak his mind ? He left before 45

The Parliament assembled. Pym, who knows
Strafford . . .

Rudyard. Would I were sure we know our-
selves !

What is for good, what, bad—who friend, who foe !

Hollis. Do you count Parliaments no gain ?

Rudyard. A gain ?

While the King's creatures overbalance us ? 50

—There's going on, beside, among ourselves

A quiet, slow, but most effectual course

Of buying over, sapping, leavening

The lump till all is leaven. Glanville's gone.

I'll put a case ; had not the Court declared 55

That no sum short of just twelve subsidies

Will be accepted by the King—our House,

I say, would have consented to that offer

To let us buy off ship-money !

Hollis. Most like,

If, say, six subsidies will buy it off, 60

The House . . .

Rudyard. Will grant them ! Hampden, do you
hear ?

Congratulate with me ! the King's the king,

And gains his point at last—our own assent

To that detested tax ? All's over, then !

There's no more taking refuge in this room, 65

Protesting, "Let the King do what he will,

"We, England, are no party to our shame :

"Our day will come !" Congratulate with me !

Pym enters

Vane. Pym, Strafford called this Parliament,
you say,

But we'll not have our Parliaments like those 70

In Ireland, Pym !

Rudyard. Let him stand forth, your friend !

One doubtful act hides far too many sins ;
It can be stretched no more, and, to my mind,
Begins to drop from those it covered.

Other Voices.

Good !

Let him avow himself ! No fitter time ! 75
We wait thus long for you.

Rudyard.

Perhaps, too long !

Since nothing but the madness of the Court,
In thus unmasking its designs at once,
Has saved us from betraying England. Stay—
This Parliament is Strafford's : let us vote 80
Our list of grievances too black by far
To suffer talk of subsidies : or best,
That ship-money 's disposed of long ago
By England : any vote that 's broad enough :
And then let Strafford, for the love of it, 85
Support his Parliament !

Vane.

And vote as well

No war to be with Scotland ! Hear you, Pym ?
We 'll vote, no war ! No part nor lot in it
For England !

Many Voices. Vote, no war ! Stop the new
levies !

No Bishops' war ! At once ! When next we
meet ! 90

Pym. Much more when next we meet ! Friends,
which of you

Since first the course of Strafford was in doubt,
Has fallen the most away in soul from me ?

Vane. I sat apart, even now, under God's eye,
Pondering the words that should denounce you,
Pym, 95

In presence of us all, as one at league
With England's enemy.

Pym.

You are a good

And gallant spirit, Henry. Take my hand

And say you pardon me for all the pain
Till now ! Strafford is wholly ours.

Many Voices. Sure ? sure ? 100

Pym. Most sure : for Charles dissolves the
Parliament

While I speak here.

—And I must speak, friends, now !

Strafford is ours. The King detects the change,
Casts Strafford off for ever, and resumes
His ancient path : no Parliament for us, 105
No Strafford for the King !

Come, all of you,
To bid the King farewell, predict success
To his Scots' expedition, and receive
Strafford, our comrade now. The next will be
Indeed a Parliament !

Vane. Forgive me, Pym ! 110

Voices. This looks like truth : Strafford can
have, indeed,

No choice.

Pym. Friends, follow me ! He's with the King.
Come, Hampden, and come, Rudyard, and come,
Vane !

This is no sullen day for England, sirs !
Strafford shall tell you !

Voices. To Whitehall then ! Come ! 115

SCENE II.—*Whitehall*

CHARLES *and* STRAFFORD

Charles. Strafford !

Strafford. Is it a dream ? my papers, here—
Thus, as I left them, all the plans you found
So happy—(look ! the track you pressed my hand

ACT II

120

Charles. Strafford, who but I?
You bade me put the rest away : indeed
You are alone.

125

130

135

140

145

The Irish Parliament? or army, either?
Is this my plan?

Charles. So disrespectful, sir?

Strafford. My liege, do not believe it! I am
yours, 150

Yours ever: 't is too late to think about:
To the death, yours. Elsewhere, this untoward
step

Shall pass for mine; the world shall think it mine.
But here! But here! I am so seldom here,
Seldom with you, my King! I, soon to rush 155
Alone upon a giant in the dark!

Charles. My Strafford!

Strafford [*examines papers awhile*]. "Seize the
passes of the Tyne!"

But, sir, you see—see all I say is true?
My plan was sure to prosper, so, no cause
To ask the Parliament for help; whereas 160
We need them frightfully.

Charles. Need the Parliament?

Strafford. Now, for God's sake, sir, not one
error more!

We can afford no error; we draw, now,
Upon our last resource: the Parliament
Must help us!

Charles. I've undone you, Strafford!

Strafford. Nay— 165

Nay—why despond, sir, 't is not come to that!

I have not hurt you? Sir, what have I said

To hurt you? I unsay it! Don't despond!

Sir, do you turn from me?

Charles. My friend of friends!

Strafford. We'll make a shift. Leave me the
Parliament! 170

Help they us ne'er so little and I'll make
Sufficient out of it. We'll speak them fair.

They 're sitting, that 's one great thing ; that half
gives

Their sanction to us ; that 's much : don't despond !
Why, let them keep their money, at the worst ! 175
The reputation of the People's help
Is all we want : we 'll make shift yet !

Charles. Good Strafford !

Strafford. But meantime, let the sum be ne'er
so small

They offer, we 'll accept it : any sum—
For the look of it : the least grant tells the Scots 180
The Parliament is ours—their staunch ally
Turned ours : that told, there 's half the blow to
strike !

What will the grant be ? What does Glanville
think ?

Charles. Alas !

Strafford. My liege ?

Charles. Strafford !

Strafford. But answer me !

Have they . . . O surely not refused us half ? 185
Half the twelve subsidies ? We never looked
For all of them. How many do they give ?

Charles. You have not heard . . .

Strafford. (What has he done ?)—Heard
what ?

But speak at once, sir, this grows terrible !

[*The KING continuing silent.*]

You have dissolved them !—I 'll not leave this man. 190

Charles. 'T was old Vane's ill-judged vehemence.

Strafford. Old Vane ?

Charles. He told them, just about to vote the
half,

That nothing short of all twelve subsidies
Would serve our turn, or be accepted.

Strafford. Vane !

Vane! Who, sir, promised me, that very Vane . . . 195
O God, to have it gone, quite gone from me,
The one last hope—I that despair, my hope—
That I should reach his heart one day, and cure
All bitterness one day, be proud again
And young again, care for the sunshine too, 200
And never think of Eliot any more,—
God, and to toil for this, go far for this,
Get nearer, and still nearer, reach this heart
And find Vane there!

*[Suddenly taking up a paper, and continuing
with a forced calmness.]*

Northumberland is sick :
Well, then, I take the army : Wilmot leads 205
The horse, and he, with Conway, must secure
The passes of the Tyne : Ormond supplies
My place in Ireland. Here, we 'll try the City :
If they refuse a loan—debase the coin
And seize the bullion ! we 've no other choice. 210
Herbert . . .

And this while I am here ! with you !
And there are hosts such, hosts like Vane ! I go,
And, I once gone, they 'll close around you, sir,
When the least pique, pettiest mistrust, is sure
To ruin me—and you along with me ! 215
Do you see that ? And you along with me !
—Sir, you 'll not ever listen to these men,
And I away, fighting your battle ? Sir,
If they—if She—charge me, no matter how—
Say you, “ At any time when he returns 220
“ His head is mine ! ” Don't stop me there ! You
know

My head is yours, but never stop me there !

Charles. Too shameful, Strafford ! You advised
the war,
And . . .

Strafford. I ! I ! that was never spoken with
Till it was entered on ! That loathe the war ! 225
That say it is the maddest, wickedest . . .
Do you know, sir, I think within my heart,
That you would say I did advise the war ;
And if, through your own weakness, or what 's
worse,
These Scots, with God to help them, drive me
back, 230
You will not step between the raging People
And me, to say . . .

I knew it ! from the first
I knew it ! Never was so cold a heart !
Remember that I said it—that I never
Believed you for a moment !

—And, you loved me ? 235
You thought your perfidy profoundly hid
Because I could not share the whisperings
With Vane, with Savile ? What, the face was
masked ?

I had the heart to see, sir ! Face of flesh,
But heart of stone—of smooth cold frightful stone ! 240
Ay, call them ! Shall I call for you ? The Scots
Goaded to madness ? Or the English—Pym—
Shall I call Pym, your subject ? Oh, you think
I 'll leave them in the dark about it all ?
They shall not know you ? Hampden, Pym shall
not ? 245

PYM, HAMPDEN, VANE, *etc.*, enter

[*Dropping on his knee.*] Thus favoured with your
gracious countenance
What shall a rebel League avail against
Your servant, utterly and ever yours ?
So, gentlemen, the King 's not even left
The privilege of bidding me farewell 250

Who haste to save the People—that you style
Your People—from the mercies of the Scots
And France their friend?

[To CHARLES.] Pym's grave grey eyes are fixed
Upon you, sir!

Your pleasure, gentlemen?

Hampden. The King dissolved us—'t is the
King we seek

255

And not Lord Strafford.

Strafford. —Strafford, guilty too
Of counselling the measure. [To CHARLES.] (Hush
. . . you know—

You have forgotten—sir, I counselled it)
A heinous matter, truly! But the King
Will yet see cause to thank me for a course 260
Which now, perchance . . . (Sir, tell them so!)
—he blames.

Well, choose some fitter time to make your charge:
I shall be with the Scots, you understand?
Then yelp at me!

Meanwhile, your Majesty
Binds me, by this fresh token of your trust . . . 265
[Under the pretence of an earnest farewell,

STRAFFORD conducts CHARLES to the
door, in such a manner as to hide his
agitation from the rest: as the King dis-
appears, they turn as by one impulse to
PYM, who has not changed his original
posture of surprise.

Hampden. Leave we this arrogant strong wicked
man!

Vane and others. Hence, Pym! Come out of
this unworthy place
To our old room again! He's gone.

[STRAFFORD, just about to follow the KING,
looks back.

Pym. Not gone !
 [To STRAFFORD.] Keep tryst ! the old appoint-
 ment 's made anew :

Forget not we shall meet again !

Strafford. So be it ! 270
 And if an army follows me ?

Vane. His friends
 Will entertain your army !

Pym. I 'll not say
 You have misreckoned, Strafford : time shows.
 Perish

Body and spirit ! Fool to feign a doubt,
 Pretend the scrupulous and nice reserve 275
 Of one whose prowess shall achieve the feat !
 What share have I in it ? Do I affect
 To see no dismal sign above your head
 When God suspends his ruinous thunder there ?
 Strafford is doomed. Touch him no one of you ! 280

[Pym, HAMPDEN, etc., go out.]

Strafford. Pym, we shall meet again !

Lady CARLISLE enters

Lady Carlisle. You here, child ?
 Hush—
 I know it all : hush, Strafford !

Strafford. Ah ? you know ?
 Well. I shall make a sorry soldier, Lucy !
 All knights begin their enterprise, we read,
 Under the best of auspices ; 't is morn, 285
 The Lady girds his sword upon the Youth
 (He 's always very young)—the trumpets sound,
 Cups pledge him, and, why, the King blesseshim—
 You need not turn a page of the romance
 To learn the Dreadful Giant's fate. Indeed, 290
 We 've the fair Lady here ; but she apart,—
 A poor man, rarely having handled lance,

And rather old, weary, and far from sure
His Squires are not the Giant's friends. All's one:
Let us go forth!

Lady Carlisle. Go forth?

Strafford. What matters it? 295

We shall die gloriously—as the book says.

Lady Carlisle. To Scotland? Not to Scotland?

Strafford. Am I sick

Like your good brother, brave Northumberland?
Beside, these walls seem falling on me.

Lady Carlisle. Strafford,

The wind that saps these walls can undermine 300
Your camp in Scotland, too. Whence creeps the
wind?

Have you no eyes except for Pym? Look here!
A breed of silken creatures lurk and thrive
In your contempt. You'll vanquish Pym? Old
Vane

Can vanquish you. And Vane you think to fly? 305
Rush on the Scots! Do nobly! Vane's slight
sneer

Shall test success, adjust the praise, suggest
The faint result: Vane's sneer shall reach you
there.

—You do not listen!

Strafford. Oh,—I give that up!

There's fate in it: I give all here quite up. 310

Care not what old Vane does or Holland does
Against me! 'T is so idle to withstand!

In no case tell me what they do!

Lady Carlisle. But, Strafford . . .

Strafford. I want a little strife, beside; real
strife;

This petty palace-warfare does me harm: 315
I shall feel better, fairly out of it.

Lady Carlisle. Why do you smile?

Strafford. I got to fear them, child !
I could have torn his throat at first, Old Vane's,
As he leered at me on his stealthy way
To the Queen's closet. Lord, one loses heart ! 320
I often found it on my lips to say
"Do not traduce me to her !"

Lady Carlisle. But the King . . .

Strafford. The King stood there, 't is not so
long ago,
—There ; and the whisper, Lucy, "Be my friend
"Of friends !" —My King ! I would have . . .

Lady Carlisle. . . . Died for him ? 325

Strafford. Sworn him true, Lucy : I can die
for him.

Lady Carlisle. But go not, Strafford ! But you
must renounce
This project on the Scots ! Die, wherefore die ?
Charles never loved you.

Strafford. And he never will.
He 's not of those who care the more for men 330
That they 're unfortunate.

Lady Carlisle. Then wherefore die
For such a master ?

Strafford. You that told me first
How good he was—when I must leave true friends
To find a truer friend !—that drew me here
From Ireland,— "I had but to show myself 335
"And Charles would spurn Vane, Savile and the
rest"—

You, child, to ask me this ?

Lady Carlisle. (If he have set
His heart abidingly on Charles !)

Then, friend,
I shall not see you any more.

Strafford. Yes, Lucy.
There 's one man here I have to meet.

Lady Carlisle.

(The King ! 340

What way to save him from the King ?

My soul—

That lent from its own store the charmed disguise
Which clothes the King—he shall behold my
soul !)

Strafford,—I shall speak best if you 'll not gaze
Upon me : I had never thought, indeed, 345
To speak, but you would perish too, so sure !
Could you but know what 't is to bear, my
friend,

One image stamped within you, turning blank
The else imperial brilliance of your mind,—
A weakness, but most precious,—like a flaw 350
I' the diamond, which should shape forth some
sweet face

Yet to create, and meanwhile treasured there
Lest nature lose her gracious thought for ever !

Strafford. When could it be ? no ! Yet . . .
was it the day

We waited in the anteroom, till Holland 355
Should leave the presence-chamber ?

Lady Carlisle.

What ?

Strafford.

—That I

Described to you my love for Charles ?

Lady Carlisle.

(Ah, no—

One must not lure him from a love like that !

Oh, let him love the King and die ! 'T is past.

I shall not serve him worse for that one brief 360
And passionate hope, silent for ever now !)

And you are really bound for Scotland then ?

I wish you well : you must be very sure

Of the King's faith, for Pym and all his crew

Will not be idle—setting Vane aside ! 365

Strafford. If Pym is busy,—you may write of
Pym.

Lady Carlisle. What need, since there 's your
King to take your part?

He may endure Vane's counsel ; but for Pym—
Think you he 'll suffer Pym to . . .

Strafford. Child, your hair
Is glossier than the Queen's !

Lady Carlisle. Is that to ask 370
A curl of me ?

Strafford. Scotland—the weary way !

Lady Carlisle. Stay, let me fasten it.
—A rival's, Strafford ?

Strafford [*showing the George*]. He hung it there :
twine yours around it, child !

Lady Carlisle. No—no—another time—I trifleso!
And there 's a masque on foot. Farewell. The
Court 375

Is dull ; do something to enliven us
In Scotland : we expect it at your hands.

Strafford. I shall not fail in Scotland.

Lady Carlisle. Prosper—if
You 'll think of me sometimes !

Strafford. How think of him
And not of you ? of you, the lingering streak 380
(A golden one) in my good fortune's eve.

Lady Carlisle. Strafford . . . Well, when the
eve has its last streak
The night has its first star. [*She goes out.*

Strafford. That voice of hers—
You 'd think she had a heart sometimes ! His voice
Is soft too.

Only God can save him now. 385
Be Thou about his bed, about his path !
His path ! Where 's England's path ? Diverging
wide,

And not to join again the track my foot
Must follow—whither ? All that forlorn way

Among the tombs! Far—far—till . . . What,
they do 390
Then join again, these paths? For, huge in the
dusk,
There 's—Pym to face!

Why then, I have a foe
To close with, and a fight to fight at last
Worthy my soul! What, do they beard the King,
And shall the King want Strafford at his need? 395
Am I not here?

Not in the market-place,
Pressed on by the rough artisans, so proud
To catch a glance from Wentworth! They liedown
Hungry yet smile "Why, it must end some day:
"Is he not watching for our sake?" Not there! 400
But in Whitehall, the whited sepulchre,
The . . .

Curse nothing to-night! Only one name
They 'll curse in all those streets to-night. Whose
fault?

Did I make kings? set up, the first, a man
To represent the multitude, receive 405
All love in right of them—supplant them so,
Until you love the man and not the king——
The man with the mild voice and mournful eyes
Which send me forth.

—To breast the bloody sea
That sweeps before me: with one star for guide. 410
Night has its first, supreme, forsaken star.

ACT III

SCENE I.—*Opposite Westminster Hall*

Sir HENRY VANE, Lord SAVILE, Lord HOLLAND
and others of the Court

Sir H. Vane. The Commons thrust you out?

Savile. And what kept you

From sharing their civility?

Sir H. Vane. Kept me?

Fresh news from Scotland, sir! worse than the last,
If that may be. All 's up with Strafford there :

Nothing to bar the mad Scots marching hither 5

Next Lord's-day morning. That detained me, sir!

Well now, before they thrust you out,—go on,—

Their Speaker—did the fellow Lenthal say

All we set down for him?

Holland. Not a word missed.

Ere he began, we entered, Savile, I 10

And Bristol and some more, with hope to breed

A wholesome awe in the new Parliament.

But such a gang of graceless ruffians, Vane,

As glared at us!

Vane. So many?

Savile. Not a bench

Without its complement of burly knaves ; 15

Your hopeful son among them : Hampden leant

Upon his shoulder—think of that!

Vane. I 'd think

On Lenthal's speech, if I could get at it.

Urged he, I ask, how grateful they should prove
For this unlooked-for summons from the King? 20

Holland. Just as we drilled him.

Vane. That the Scots will march
On London?

Holland. All, and made so much of it,
A dozen subsidies at least seemed sure
To follow, when . . .

Vane. Well?

Holland. 'T is a strange thing, now!
I 've a vague memory of a sort of sound, 25
A voice, a kind of vast unnatural voice—
Pym, sir, was speaking! Savile, help me out:
What was it all?

Savile. Something about "a matter"—
No,—“work for England.”

Holland. “England's great revenge”
He talked of.

Savile. How should I get used to Pym 30
More than yourselves?

Holland. However that be,
'T was something with which we had nought to do,
For we were “strangers” and 't was “England's
work”—

(All this while looking us straight in the face)
In other words, our presence might be spared. 35
So, in the twinkling of an eye, before
I settled to my mind what ugly brute
Was likest Pym just then, they yelled us out,
Locked the doors after us, and here are we.

Vane. Eliot's old method . . .

Savile. Prithee, Vane, a truce 40
To Eliot and his times, and the great Duke,
And how to manage Parliaments! 'T was you
Advised the Queen to summon this: why, Strafford
(To do him justice) would not hear of it.

Vane. Say rather, you have done the best of turns

45

To Strafford : he 's at York, we all know why.
I would you had not set the Scots on Strafford
Till Strafford put down Pym for us, my lord !

Savile. Was it I altered Strafford's plans ? did I . . .

A Messenger enters

Messenger. The Queen, my lords—she sends me : follow me

50

At once ; 't is very urgent ! she requires
Your counsel : something perilous and strange
Occasions her command.

Savile. We follow, friend !

Now, Vane ;—your Parliament will plague us all !

Vane. No Strafford here beside !

Savile. If you dare hint 55

I had a hand in his betrayal, sir . . .

Holland. Nay, find a fitter time for quarrels—

Pym

Will overmatch the best of you ; and, think,
The Queen !

Vane. Come on, then : understand, I loathe
Strafford as much as any—but his use !

60

To keep off Pym, to screen a friend or two,
I would we had reserved him yet awhile.

SCENE II.—*Whitehall*

The QUEEN and Lady CARLISLE

Queen. It cannot be.

Lady Carlisle.

It is so.

Queen.

Why, the House

Have hardly met.

Lady Carlisle. They met for that.

Queen. No, no !

Meet to impeach Lord Strafford ? 'T is a jest. 65

Lady Carlisle. A bitter one.

Queen. Consider ! 'T is the House

We summoned so reluctantly, which nothing

But the disastrous issue of the war

Persuaded us to summon. They 'll wreak all

Their spite on us, no doubt ; but the old way 70

Is to begin by talk of grievances :

They have their grievances to busy them.

Lady Carlisle. Pym has begun his speech.

Queen. Where 's Vane ?—That is,

Pym will impeach Lord Strafford if he leaves

His Presidency ; he 's at York, we know, 75

Since the Scots beat him : why should he leave
York ?

Lady Carlisle. Because the King sent for him.

Queen. Ah—but if

The King did send for him, he let him know

We had been forced to call a Parliament—

A step which Strafford, now I come to think, 80

Was vehement against.

Lady Carlisle. The policy

Escaped him, of first striking Parliaments

To earth, then setting them upon their feet

And giving them a sword : but this is idle.

Did the King send for Strafford ? He will
come. 85

Queen. And what am I to do ?

Lady Carlisle. What do ? Fail, madam !

Be ruined for his sake ! what matters how,

So it but stand on record that you made

An effort, only one ?

Queen.

The King away

At Theobald's !

Lady Carlisle. Send for him at once : he must
Dissolve the House. 90

Queen. Wait till Vane finds the truth
Of the report : then . . .

Lady Carlisle. —It will matter little
What the King does. Strafford that lends his
arm
And breaks his heart for you !

Sir H. VANE *enters*

Vane. The Commons, madam,
Are sitting with closed doors. A huge debate, 95
No lack of noise ; but nothing, I should guess,
Concerning Strafford : Pym has certainly
Not spoken yet.

Queen [*to Lady CARLISLE*]. You hear ?

Lady Carlisle. I do not hear
That the King's sent for !

Vane. Savile will be able
To tell you more.

HOLLAND *enters*

Queen. The last news, Holland ?

Holland. Pym 100
Is raging like a fire. The whole House means
To follow him together to Whitehall
And force the King to give up Strafford.

Queen. Strafford ?

Holland. If they content themselves with Straf-
ford ! Laud
Is talked of, Cottington and Windebank too. 105
Pym has not left out one of them—I would
You heard Pym raging !

Queen. Vane, go find the King !
Tell the King, Vane, the People follow Pym
To brave us at Whitehall !

SAVILLE *enters*

Savile Not to Whitehall—
 'T is to the Lords they go : they seek redress 110
 On Strafford from his peers—the legal way,
 They call it.

Queen. (Wait, Vane !)

Savile. But the adage gives
 Long life to threatened men. Strafford can save
 Himself so readily : at York, remember,
 In his own county : what has he to fear ? 115
 The Commons only mean to frighten him
 From leaving York. Surely, he will not come.

Queen. Lucy, he will not come !

Lady Carlisle. Once more, the King
 Has sent for Strafford. He will come.

Vane. Oh doubtless !
 And bring destruction with him : that 's his
 way. 120

What but his coming spoilt all Conway's plan ?
 The King must take his counsel, choose his friends,
 Be wholly ruled by him ! What 's the result ?
 The North that was to rise, Ireland to help,—
 What came of it ? In my poor mind, a fright 125
 Is no prodigious punishment.

Lady Carlisle. A fright ?
 Pym will fail worse than Strafford if he thinks
 To frighten him. [*To the QUEEN.*] You will not
 save him then ?

Savile. When something like a charge is made,
 the King
 Will best know how to save him : and 't is clear, 130
 While Strafford suffers nothing by the matter,
 The King may reap advantage : this in question,
 No dinning you with ship-money complaints !

Queen [to Lady CARLISLE]. If we dissolve
them, who will pay the army?
Protect us from the insolent Scots?

Lady Carlisle. In truth, 135
I know not, madam. Strafford's fate concerns
Me little: you desired to learn what course
Would save him: I obey you.

Vane. Notice, too,
There can't be fairer ground for taking full
Revenge—(Strafford's revengeful)—than he 'll
have 140
Against his old friend Pym.

Queen. Why, he shall claim
Vengeance on Pym!

Vane. And Strafford, who is he
To 'scape unscathed amid the accidents
That harass all beside? I, for my part,
Should look for something of discomfiture 145
Had the King trusted me so thoroughly
And been so paid for it.

Holland. He 'll keep at York:
All will blow over: he 'll return no worse,
Humbled a little, thankful for a place
Under as good a man. Oh, we 'll dispense 150
With seeing Strafford for a month or two!

STRAFFORD *enters*

Queen. You here!

Strafford. The King sends for me, madam.

Queen. Sir,

The King . . .

Strafford. An urgent matter that imports the
King!

[To Lady CARLISLE.] Why, Lucy, what's in agi-
tation now,

That all this muttering and shrugging, see, 155
Begins at me? They do not speak!

Lady Carlisle. 'T is welcome!
For we are proud of you—happy and proud
To have you with us, Strafford! You were staunch
At Durham: you did well there! Had you not
Been stayed, you might have . . . we said, even now, 160
Our hope 's in you!

Vane [*to* Lady CARLISLE]. The Queen would
speak with you.

Strafford. Will one of you, his servants here,
vouchsafe
To signify my presence to the King?

Savile. An urgent matter?

Strafford. None that touches you,
Lord Savile! Say, it were some treacherous 165
Sly pitiful intriguing with the Scots—
You would go free, at least! (They half divine
My purpose!) Madam, shall I see the King?
The service I would render, much concerns
His welfare.

Queen. But his Majesty, my lord, 170
May not be here, may . . .

Strafford. Its importance, then,
Must plead excuse for this withdrawal, madam,
And for the grief it gives Lord Savile here.

Queen [*who has been conversing with VANE and*
HOLLAND]. The King will see you, sir!
[*To* Lady CARLISLE.] Mark me: Pym's worst 175
Is done by now: he has impeached the Earl,
Or found the Earl too strong for him, by now.
Let us not seem instructed! We should work
No good to Strafford, but deform ourselves
With shame in the world's eye. [*To* STRAFFORD.]

His Majesty
Has much to say with you.

Strafford. Time fleeting, too! 180
[*To Lady CARLISLE.*] No means of getting them
away? And She—

What does she whisper? Does she know my
purpose?

What does she think of it? Get them away!

Queen [*to Lady CARLISLE.*] He comes to baffle
Pym—he thinks the danger

Far off: tell him no word of it! a time 185

For help will come; we 'll not be wanting then.

Keep him in play, Lucy—you, self-possessed

And calm! [*To STRAFFORD.*] To spare your lord-
ship some delay

I will myself acquaint the King. [*To Lady
CARLISLE.*] Beware!

[*The QUEEN, VANE, HOLLAND, and SAVILE go out.*]

Strafford. She knows it?

Lady Carlisle.

Tell me, *Strafford*!

Strafford.

Afterward! 190

This moment 's the great moment of all time.

She knows my purpose?

Lady Carlisle.

Thoroughly: just now

She bade me hide it from you.

Strafford.

Quick, dear child,

The whole o' the scheme?

Lady Carlisle.

(Ah, he would learn if they

Connive at Pym's procedure! Could they but 195

Have once apprised the King! But there's no time
For falsehood, now.) *Strafford*, the whole is known.

Strafford. Known and approved?

Lady Carlisle.

Hardly discountenanced.

Strafford. And the King—say, the King con-
sents as well?

Lady Carlisle. The King's not yet informed, but
will not dare

To interpose. 200

Strafford. What need to wait him, then?
 He'll sanction it! I stayed, child, tell him, long!
 It vexed me to the soul—this waiting here.
 You know him, there's no counting on the King.
 Tell him I waited long!

Lady Carlisle. (What can he mean? 205
 Rejoice at the King's hollowness?)

Strafford. I knew
 They would be glad of it,—all over once,
 I knew they would be glad: but he'd contrive,
 The Queen and he, to mar, by helping it,
 An angel's making.

Lady Carlisle. (Is he mad?) Dear Strafford, 210
 You were not wont to look so happy.

Strafford. Sweet,
 I tried obedience thoroughly. I took
 The King's wild plan: of course, ere I could reach
 My army, Conway ruined it. I drew
 The wrecks together, raised all heaven and earth, 215
 And would have fought the Scots: the King at once
 Made truce with them. Then, Lucy, then, dear
 child,

God put it in my mind to love, serve, die
 For Charles, but never to obey him more!
 While he endured their insolence at Ripon 220
 I fell on them at Durham. But you'll tell
 The King I waited? All the anteroom
 Is filled with my adherents.

Lady Carlisle. Strafford—Strafford,
 What daring act is this you hint?

Strafford. No, no!
 'T is here, not daring if you knew? all here! 225

[*Drawing papers from his breast.*
 Full proof, see, ample proof—does the Queen know
 I have such damning proof? Bedford and Essex,
 Brooke, Warwick, Savile (did you notice Savile?)

The simper that I spoilt?), Saye, Mandeville—
Sold to the Scots, body and soul, by Pym! 230

Lady Carlisle. Great heaven!

Strafford. From Savile and his lords, to Pym
And his losels, crushed!—Pym shall not ward the
blow

Nor Savile creep aside from it! The Crew
And the Cabal—I crush them!

Lady Carlisle. And you go—
Strafford,—and now you go?—

Strafford. —About no work 235
In the background, I promise you! I go
Straight to the House of Lords to claim these knaves.
Mainwaring!

Lady Carlisle. Stay—stay, Strafford!

Strafford. She'll return,
The Queen—some little project of her own!
No time to lose: the King takes fright perhaps. 240

Lady Carlisle. Pym's strong, remember!

Strafford. Very strong, as fits
The Faction's head—with no offence to Hampden,
Vane, Rudyard and my loving Hollis: one
And all they lodge within the Tower to-night
In just equality. Bryan! Mainwaring! 245

[*Many of his Adherents enter.*]

The Peers debate just now (a lucky chance)
On the Scots' war; my visit's opportune.
When all is over, Bryan, you proceed
To Ireland: these dispatches, mark me, Bryan,
Are for the Deputy, and these for Ormond: 250
We want the army here—my army, raised
At such a cost, that should have done such good,
And was inactive all the time! no matter,
We'll find a use for it. Willis . . . or, no—you!
You, friend, make haste to York: bear this, at
once . . . 255

Or,—better stay for form's sake, see yourself
The news you carry. You remain with me
To execute the Parliament's command,
Mainwaring! Help to seize these lesser knaves,
Take care there 's no escaping at backdoors : 260
I 'll not have one escape, mind me—not one!
I seem revengeful, Lucy? Did you know
What these men dare!

Lady Carlisle. It is so much they dare!

Strafford. I proved that long ago; my turn is now.
Keep sharp watch, Goring, on the citizens! 265
Observe who harbours any of the brood
That scramble off: be sure they smart for it!
Our coffers are but lean.

And you, child, too,
Shall have your task; deliver this to Laud.
Laud will not be the slowest in my praise : 270
“Thorough” he 'll cry!—Foolish, to be so glad!
This life is gay and glowing, after all:
'T is worth while, Lucy, having foes like mine
Just for the bliss of crushing them. To-day
Is worth the living for.

Lady Carlisle. That reddening brow! 275
You seem . . .

Strafford. Well—do I not? I would be well—
I could not but be well on such a day!
And, this day ended, 't is of slight import
How long the ravaged frame subjects the soul
In Strafford.

Lady Carlisle. Noble Strafford!

Strafford. No farewell! 280
I 'll see you anon, to-morrow—the first thing.
—If She should come to stay me!

Lady Carlisle. Go—'t is nothing—
Only my heart that swells: it has been thus
Ere now: go, Strafford!

Strafford. To-night, then, let it be.
 I must see Him : you, the next after Him. 285
 I'll tell you how Pym looked. Follow me, friends!
 You, gentlemen, shall see a sight this hour
 To talk of all your lives. Close after me !
 " My friend of friends ! "

[STRAFFORD and the rest go out.]

Lady Carlisle. The King—ever the King !
 No thought of one beside, whose little word 290
 Unveils the King to him—one word from me,
 Which yet I do not breathe !

Ah, have I spared
 Strafford a pang, and shall I seek reward
 Beyond that memory ? Surely too, some way
 He is the better for my love. No, no— 295
 He would not look so joyous—I'll believe
 His very eye would never sparkle thus,
 Had I not prayed for him this long, long while.

SCENE III.—*The Ante-chamber of the House of Lords*

*Many of the Presbyterian Party. The Adherents
 of STRAFFORD, etc.*

A Group of Presbyterians.—1. I tell you he
 struck Maxwell : Maxwell sought
 To stay the Earl : he struck him and passed on. 300
 2. Fear as you may, keep a good countenance
 Before these rufflers.

3. Strafford here the first,
 With the great army at his back !

4. No doubt.
 I would Pym had made haste : that's Bryan,
 hush—
 The gallant pointing.

Strafford's Followers.—I. Mark these worthies,
now!

305

2. A goodly gathering! "Where the carcass is
"There shall the eagles"—what 's the rest?

3. For eagles
Say crows.

A Presbyterian. Stand back, sirs!

One of Strafford's Followers. Are we in Geneva?

A Presbyterian. No, nor in Ireland; we have
leave to breathe.

One of Strafford's Followers. Truly? Behold
how privileged we be
That serve "King Pym"! There 's Some-one at
Whitehall

310

Who skulks obscure; but Pym struts . . .

The Presbyterian. Nearer.

A Follower of Strafford. Higher,

We look to see him. [*To his Companions.*] I 'm
to have St. John

In charge; was he among the knaves just now
That followed Pym within there?

Another. The gaunt man
Talking with Rudyard. Did the Earl expect
Pym at his heels so fast? I like it not.

315

MAXWELL *enters*

Another. Why, man, they rush into the net!
Here 's Maxwell—

Ha, Maxwell? How the brethren flock around
The fellow! Do you feel the Earl's hand yet
Upon your shoulder, Maxwell?

320

Maxwell. Gentlemen,
Stand back! a great thing passes here.

A Follower of Strafford. [*To another.*] The Earl
Is at his work! [*To M.*] Say, Maxwell, what great
thing!

Speak out! [*To a Presbyterian.*] Friend, I've a kindness for you! Friend, I've seen you with St. John: O stockishness! 325
Wear such a ruff, and never call to mind St. John's head in a charger? How, the plague, Not laugh?

Another. Say, Maxwell, what great thing!

Another. Nay, wait:
The jest will be to wait.

First. And who's to bear
These demure hypocrites? You'd swear they came . . .

Came . . . just as we come! 330

[*A Puritan enters hastily and without observing* STRAFFORD'S Followers.

The Puritan. How goes on the work?
Has Pym . . .

A Follower of Strafford. The secret's out at last. Aha,

The carrion's scented! Welcome, crow the first!
Gorge merrily, you with the blinking eye!

"King Pym has fallen!"

The Puritan. Pym?

A Strafford. Pym!

A Presbyterian. Only Pym? 335

Many of Strafford's Followers. No, brother, not Pym only; Vane as well,

Rudyard as well, Hampden, St. John as well!

A Presbyterian. My mind misgives: can it be true?

Another. Lost! Lost!

A Strafford. Say we true, Maxwell?

The Puritan. Pride before destruction,
A haughty spirit goeth before a fall. 340

Many of Strafford's Followers. Ah now! The very thing! A word in season!

A golden apple in a silver picture,
To greet Pym as he passes !

[The doors at the back begin to open, noise and light issuing.]

Maxwell. Stand back, all !

Many of the Presbyterians. I hold with Pym !
And I !

Strafford's Followers. Now for the text !

He comes ! Quick !

The Puritan. How hath the oppressor ceased ! 345

The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked !

The sceptre of the rulers, he who smote

The people in wrath with a continual stroke,

That ruled the nations in his anger—he

Is persecuted and none hindereth ! 350

[The doors open, and STRAFFORD issues in the greatest disorder, and amid cries from within of "Void the house !"]

Strafford. Impeach me ! Pym ! I never struck,
I think,

The felon on that calm insulting mouth

When it proclaimed—Pym's mouth proclaimed
me . . . God !

Was it a word, only a word that held

The outrageous blood back on my heart—which
beats !

Which beats ! Some one word—"Traitor," did
he say, 355

Bending that eye, brimful of bitter fire,
Upon me ?

Maxwell. In the Commons' name, their servant
Demands Lord Strafford's sword.

Strafford. What did you say ?

Maxwell. The Commons bid me ask your
lordship's sword. 360

Strafford. Let us go forth: follow me, gentlemen !

Draw your swords too : cut any down that bar us.
On the King's service ! Maxwell, clear the way !

[The Presbyterians prepare to dispute his passage.]

Strafford. I stay : the King himself shall see me here.

Your tablets, fellow !

[To MAINWARING.] Give that to the King ! 365

Yes, Maxwell, for the next half-hour, let be !

Nay, you shall take my sword !

[MAXWELL advances to take it.]

Or, no—not that !

Their blood, perhaps, may wipe out all thus far,
All up to that—not that ! Why, friend, you see
When the King lays your head beneath my foot 370
It will not pay for that. Go, all of you !

Maxwell. I dare, my lord, to disobey : none stir !

Strafford. This gentle Maxwell !—Do not touch him, Bryan !

[To the Presbyterians.] Whichever cur of you will carry this

Escapes his fellow's fate. None saves his life ? 375
None ? *[Cries from within of "STRAFFORD !"]*

Slingsby, I've loved you at least : make haste !

Stab me ! I have not time to tell you why.

You then, my Bryan ! Mainwaring, you then !

Is it because I spoke so hastily

At Allerton ? The King had vexed me.

[To the Presbyterians.] You ! 380

—Not even you ? If I live over this,

The King is sure to have your heads, you know !

But what if I can't live this minute through ?

Pym, who is there with his pursuing smile !

[Louder cries of "STRAFFORD !"]

The King ! I troubled him, stood in the way 385

Of his negotiations, was the one
Great obstacle to peace, the Enemy
Of Scotland : and he sent for me, from York,
My safety guaranteed—having prepared
A Parliament—I see ! And at Whitehall 390
The Queen was whispering with Vane—I see
The trap ! *[Tearing off the George.*

I tread a gewgaw underfoot,
And cast a memory from me. One stroke, now !
*[His own Adherents disarm him. Renewed
cries of "STRAFFORD !"*

England ! I see thy arm in this and yield.
Pray you now—Pym awaits me—pray you now ! 395
*[STRAFFORD reaches the doors: they open wide.
HAMPDEN and a crowd discovered, and,
at the bar, PYM standing apart. As
STRAFFORD kneels, the scene shuts.*

ACT IV

SCENE I.—*Whitehall*

The KING, the QUEEN, HOLLIS, Lady CARLISLE.
(*VANE, HOLLAND, SAVILE, in the background*)

Lady Carlisle. Answer them, Hollis, for his sake!
One word!

Charles. [*To HOLLIS.*] You stand, silent and cold, as though I were
Deceiving you—my friend, my playfellow
Of other times. What wonder after all?
Just so, I dreamed my People loved me.

Hollis.

Sir, 5

It is yourself that you deceive, not me.
You 'll quit me comforted, your mind made up
That, since you 've talked thus much and grieved
thus much,
All you can do for Strafford has been done.

Queen. If you kill Strafford—(come, we grant
you leave, 10
Suppose)—

Hollis. I may withdraw, sir?

Lady Carlisle. Hear them out!

'Tis the last chance for Strafford! Hear them out!

Hollis. "If we kill Strafford"—on the eight-
teenth day

Of Strafford's trial—"We!"

Charles.

Pym, my good Hollis—

Pym, I should say!

Hollis. Ah, true—sir, pardon me ! 15
You witness our proceedings every day ;
But the screened gallery, I might have guessed,
Admits of such a partial glimpse at us,
Pym takes up all the room, shuts out the view.
Still, on my honour, sir, the rest of the place 20
Is not unoccupied. The Commons sit
—That 's England ; Ireland sends, and Scotland
too,
Their representatives ; the Peers that judge
Are easily distinguished ; one remarks
The People here and there : but the close curtain 25
Must hide so much !

Queen. Acquaint your insolent crew,
This day the curtain shall be dashed aside !
It served a purpose.

Hollis. Think ! This very day ?
Ere Strafford rises to defend himself ?

Charles. I will defend him, sir !—sanction the past 30
This day : it ever was my purpose. Rage
At me, not Strafford !

Lady Carlisle. Nobly !—will he not
Do nobly ?

Hollis. Sir, you will do honestly ;
And, for that deed, I too would be a king.

Charles. Only, to do this now !—“deaf” (in your
style) 35
“To subjects’ prayers,”—I must oppose them now !
It seems their will the trial should proceed,—
So palpably their will !

Hollis. You peril much,
But it were no bright moment save for that.
Strafford, your prime support, the sole roof-tree 40
Which props this quaking House of Privilege,
(Floods come, winds beat, and see—the treacher-
ous sand !)

Doubtless, if the mere putting forth an arm
Could save him, you 'd save Strafford.

Charles. And they dare
Consummate calmly this great wrong! No hope? 45
This ineffaceable wrong? No pity then?

Hollis. No plague in store for perfidy?—Fare-
well!

You called me, sir—[*To Lady CARLISLE.*] you, lady,
bade me come

To save the Earl: I came, thank God for it,
To learn how far such perfidy can go! 50
You, sir, concert with me on saving him
Who have just ruined Strafford!

Charles. I?—and how?

Hollis. Eighteen days long he throws, one after
one,
Pym's charges back: a blind moth-eaten law!
—He 'll break from it at last: and whom to
thank? 55

The mouse that gnawed the lion's net for him
Got a good friend,—but he, the other mouse,
That looked on while the lion freed himself—
Fared he so well, does any fable say?

Charles. What can you mean?

Hollis. Pym never could have proved 60
Strafford's design of bringing up the troops
To force this kingdom to obedience: Vane—
Your servant, not our friend, has proved it.

Charles. Vane?

Hollis. This day. Did Vane deliver up or no
Those notes which, furnished by his son to Pym, 65
Seal Strafford's fate?

Charles. Sir, as I live, I know
Nothing that Vane has done! What treason next?
I wash my hands of it. Vane, speak the truth!
Ask Vane himself!

Hollis. I will not speak to Vane,
Who speak to Pym and Hampden every day. 70

Queen. Speak to Vane's master then! What
gain to him
Were Strafford's death?

Hollis. Ha? Strafford cannot turn
As you, sir, sit there—bid you forth, demand
If every hateful act were not set down
In his commission?—whether you contrived 75
Or no, that all the violence should seem
His work, the gentle ways—your own,—his part,
To counteract the King's kind impulses—
While . . . but you know what he could say!

And then
He might produce,—mark, sir!—a certain charge 80
To set the King's express command aside,
If need were, and be blameless. He might add . . .

Charles. Enough!

Hollis. —Who bade him break the Parliament,
Find some pretence for setting up sword-law!

Queen. Retire!

Charles. Once more, whatever Vane dared do, 85
I know not: he is rash, a fool—I know
Nothing of Vane!

Hollis. Well—I believe you. Sir,
Believe me, in return, that . . .

[*Turning to Lady CARLISLE.*] Gentle lady,
The few words I would say, the stones might
hear

Sooner than these,—I rather speak to you, 90
You, with the heart! The question, trust me, takes
Another shape, to-day: not, if the King
Or England shall succumb,—but, who shall pay
The forfeit, Strafford or his master. Sir,
You loved me once: think on my warning
now!

[*Goes out.* 95

Charles. On you and on your warning both!—
Carlisle!

That paper!

Queen. But consider!

Charles. Give it me!

There, signed—will that content you? Do not
speak!

You have betrayed me, Vane! See! any day,
According to the tenor of that paper, 100
He bids your brother bring the army up,
Strafford shall head it and take full revenge.
Seek Strafford! Let him have the same, be-
fore

He rises to defend himself!

Queen. In truth?

That your shrewd Hollis should have worked a
change 105
Like this! You, late reluctant . . .

Charles. Say, Carlisle,
Your brother Percy brings the army up,
Falls on the Parliament—(I'll think of you,
My Hollis!) say, we plotted long—'t is mine,
The scheme is mine, remember! Say, I cursed 110
Vane's folly in your hearing! If the Earl
Does rise to do us shame, the fault shall lie
With you, Carlisle!

Lady Carlisle. Nay, fear not me! but still
That's a bright moment, sir, you throw away.
Tear down the veil and save him!

Queen. Go, Carlisle! 115

Lady Carlisle. (I shall see Strafford—speak to
him: my heart

Must never beat so, then! And if I tell
The truth? What's gained by falsehood? There
they stand

Whose trade it is, whose life it is! How vain

To gild such rottenness! Strafford shall know, 120
Thoroughly know them!)

Queen. Trust to me! [*To CARLISLE.*] Carlisle,
You seem inclined, alone of all the Court,
To serve poor Strafford: this bold plan of yours
Merits much praise, and yet . . .

Lady Carlisle. Time presses, madam.

Queen. Yet—may it not be something pre- 125
mature?

Strafford defends himself to-day—reserves
Some wondrous effort, one may well suppose!

Lady Carlisle. Ay, Hollis hints as much.

Charles. Why linger then?

Haste with the scheme—my scheme: I shall be
there

To watch his look. Tell him I watch his look! 130

Queen. Stay, we'll precede you!

Lady Carlisle. At your pleasure.

Charles. Say—

Say, Vane is hardly ever at Whitehall!

I shall be there, remember!

Lady Carlisle. Doubt me not.

Charles. On our return, Carlisle, we wait you
here!

Lady Carlisle. I'll bring his answer. Sir, I
follow you. 135

(Prove the King faithless, and I take away
All Strafford cares to live for: let it be—
'T is the King's scheme!

My Strafford, I can save,
Nay, I have saved you, yet am scarce content,
Because my poor name will not cross your mind. 140
Strafford, how much I am unworthy you!)

SCENE II.—*A Passage adjoining Westminster Hall*

Many Groups of Spectators of the Trial. Officers of the Court, etc.

1st Spectator. More crowd than ever! Not know Hampden, man? That 's he, by Pym, Pym that is speaking now. No, truly, if you look so high you 'll see Little enough of either!

2nd Spectator. Stay : Pym's arm 145
Points like a prophet's rod.

3rd Spectator. Ay, ay, we 've heard Some pretty speaking : yet the Earl escapes.

4th Spectator. I fear it : just a foolish word or two
About his children—and we see, forsooth,
Not England's foe in Strafford, but the man 150
Who, sick, half-blind . . .

2nd Spectator. What 's that Pym 's saying now Which makes the curtains flutter? look! A hand Clutches them. Ah! The King's hand!

5th Spectator. I had thought Pym was not near so tall. What said he, friend?

2nd Spectator. "Nor is this way a novel way of blood," 155
And the Earl turns as if to . . . look! look!

Many Spectators. There!
What ails him? no—he rallies, see—goes on,
And Strafford smiles. Strange!

An Officer. Haselrig!

Many Spectators. Friend? Friend?

The Officer. Lost, utterly lost : just when we looked for Pym

To make a stand against the ill effects 160
 Of the Earl's speech! Is Haselrig without?
 Pym's message is to him.

3rd Spectator. Now, said I true?
 Will the Earl leave them yet at fault or no?

1st Spectator. Never believe it, man! These
 notes of Vane's
 Ruin the Earl.

5th Spectator. A brave end: not a whit 165
 Less firm, less Pym all over. Then, the trial
 Is closed. No—Strafford means to speak again?

An Officer. Stand back, there!

5th Spectator. Why, the Earl is coming
 hither!

Before the court breaks up! His brother, look,—
 You'd say he'd deprecated some fierce act 170
 In Strafford's mind just now.

An Officer. Stand back, I say!

2nd Spectator. Who's the veiled woman that he
 talks with?

Many Spectators. Hush—
 The Earl! the Earl!

[*Enter STRAFFORD, SLINGSBY, and other
 Secretaries, HOLLIS, Lady CARLISLE,
 MAXWELL, BALFOUR, etc. STRAFFORD
 converses with Lady CARLISLE.*]

Hollis. So near the end! Be patient—
 Return!

Strafford [*to his Secretaries*]. Here—anywhere
 —or, 't is freshest here!

To spend one's April here, the blossom-month: 175
 Set it down here!

[*They arrange a table, papers, etc.*]

So, Pym can quail, can cower
 Because I glance at him, yet more 's to do?
 What 's to be answered, Slingsby? Let us end!

[To LADY CARLISLE.] Child, I refuse his offer ;
whatsoever

It be ! Too late ! Tell me no word of him ! 180

'T is something, Hollis, I assure you that—

To stand, sick as you are, some eighteen days

Fighting for life and fame against a pack

Of very curs, that lie through thick and thin,

Eat flesh and bread by wholesale, and can't say 185

"Strafford" if it would take my life !

Lady Carlisle.

Be moved !

Glance at the paper !

Strafford.

Already at my heels !

Pym's faulting bloodhounds scent the track again.

Peace, child ! Now, Slingsby !

[Messengers from LANE and other of STRAFFORD'S Counsel within the Hall are coming and going during the Scene.]

Strafford [setting himself to write and dictate]. I
shall beat you, Hollis !

Do you know that ? In spite of St. John's tricks, 190

In spite of Pym—your Pym who shrank from me !

Eliot would have contrived it otherwise.

[To a Messenger.] In truth ? This slip, tell Lane,
contains as much

As I can call to mind about the matter.

Eliot would have disdained . . .

[Calling after the Messenger.] And Radcliffe, say, 195

The only person who could answer Pym,

Is safe in prison, just for that.

Well, well !

It had not been recorded in that case,

I baffled you.

[To LADY CARLISLE.] Nay, child, why look so
grieved ?

All 's gained without the King ! You saw Pym
quail ?

What shall I do when they acquit me, think you,
But tranquilly resume my task as though
Nothing had intervened since I proposed
To call that traitor to account! Such tricks,
Trust me, shall not be played a second time, 205
Nor even against Laud, with his grey hair—
Your good work, Hollis! Peace! To make amends,
You, Lucy, shall be here when I impeach
Pym and his fellows.

Hollis. Wherefore not protest
Against our whole proceeding, long ago? 210
Why feel indignant now? Why stand this while
Enduring patiently?

Strafford. Child, I'll tell you—
You, and not Pym—you, the slight graceful girl
Tall for a flowering lily, and not Hollis—
Why I stood patient! I was fool enough 215
To see the will of England in Pym's will;
To fear, myself had wronged her, and to wait
Her judgment: when, behold, in place of it . . .
[*To a Messenger who whispers.*] Tell Lane to
answer no such question! Law,—
I grapple with their law! I'm here to try 220
My actions by their standard, not my own!
Their law allowed that levy: what's the rest
To Pym, or Lane, any but God and me?

Lady Carlisle. The King's so weak! Secure
this chance! 'T was Vane,
Never forget, who furnished Pym the notes . . . 225

Strafford. Fit,—very fit, those precious notes
of Vane,
To close the Trial worthily! I feared
Some spice of nobleness might linger yet
And spoil the character of all the past.
Vane eased me . . . and I will go back and say 230
As much—to Pym, to England! Follow me!

I have a word to say ! There, my defence
Is done !

Stay ! why be proud ? Why care to own
My gladness, my surprise ?—Nay, not surprise !
Wherefore insist upon the little pride 235
Of doing all myself, and sparing him
The pain ? Child, say the triumph is my King's !
When Pym grew pale, and trembled, and sank
down,

One image was before me : could I fail ?
Child, care not for the past, so indistinct, 240
Obscure—there 's nothing to forgive in it,
'T is so forgotten ! From this day begins
A new life, founded on a new belief
In Charles.

Hollis. In Charles ? Rather believe in Pym ?
And here he comes in proof ! Appeal to Pym ! 245
Say how unfair . . .

Strafford. To Pym ? I would say nothing !
I would not look upon Pym's face again.

Lady Carlisle. Stay, let me have to think I
pressed your hand !

[STRAFFORD and his friends go out.]

Enter HAMPDEN and VANE

Vane. O Hampden, save the great misguided
man !

Plead Strafford's cause with Pym ! I have remarked 250
He moved no muscle when we all declaimed
Against him : you had but to breathe—he turned
Those kind calm eyes upon you.

[*Enter Pym, the Solicitor-General ST. JOHN,*
the Managers of the Trial, FIENNES,
RUDYARD, etc.

Rudyard. Horrible !
Till now all hearts were with you : I withdraw

For one. Too horrible ! But we mistake
Your purpose, Pym : you cannot snatch away
The last spar from the drowning man. 255

Fiennes. He talks
With St. John of it—see, how quietly !
[*To other Presbyterians.*] You 'll join us ? Straf-
ford may deserve the worst :
But this new course is monstrous. Vane, take heart ? 260
This Bill of his Attainder shall not have
One true man's hand to it.

Vane. Consider, Pym !
Confront your Bill, your own Bill : what is it ?
You cannot catch the Earl on any charge,—
No man will say the law has hold of him 265
On any charge ; and therefore you resolve
To take the general sense on his desert,
As though no law existed, and we met
To found one. You refer to Parliament
To speak its thought upon the abortive mass 270
Of half-borne-out assertions, dubious hints
Hereafter to be cleared, distortions—ay,
And wild inventions. Every man is saved
The task of fixing any single charge
On Strafford : he has but to see in him 275
The enemy of England.

Pym. A right scruple !
I have heard some called England's enemy
With less consideration.

Vane. Pity me !
Indeed you made me think I was your friend !
I who have murdered Strafford, how remove 280
That memory from me ?

Pym. I absolve you, Vane.
Take you no care for ought that you have done !

Vane. John Hampden, not this Bill ! Reject
this Bill !

He staggers through the ordeal : let him go,
Strew no fresh fire before him ! Plead for us ! 285
When Strafford spoke, your eyes were thick with
tears !

Hampden. England speaks louder : who are
we, to play

The generous pardoner at her expense,
Magnanimously waive advantages,
And, if he conquer us, applaud his skill ? 290

Vane. He was your friend.

Pym. I have heard that before.

Fiennes. And England trusts you.

Hampden. Shame be his, who turns
The opportunity of serving her
She trusts him with, to his own mean account—
Who would look nobly frank at her expense ! 295

Fiennes. I never thought it could have come to
this.

Pym. But I have made myself familiar, Fiennes,
With this one thought—have walked, and sat, and
slept,
This thought before me. I have done such things, 300
Being the chosen man that should destroy
The traitor. You have taken up this thought
To play with, for a gentle stimulant,
To give a dignity to idler life
By the dim prospect of emprise to come, 305
But ever with the softening, sure belief,
That all would end some strange way right at last.

Fiennes. Had we made out some weightier charge !

Pym. You say

That these are petty charges : can we come
To the real charge at all ? There he is safe 310
In tyranny's stronghold. Apostasy
Is not a crime, treachery not a crime :
The cheek burns, the blood tingles, when you speak

The words, but where 's the power to take revenge
Upon them? We must make occasion serve,—
The oversight shall pay for the main sin 315
That mocks us.

Rudyard. But this unexampled course,
This Bill!

Pym. By this, we roll the clouds away
Of precedent and custom, and at once
Bid the great beacon-light God sets in all,
The conscience of each bosom, shine upon 320
The guilt of Strafford: each man lay his hand
Upon his breast, and judge!

Vane. I only see
Strafford, nor pass his corpse for all beyond!

Rudyard and others. Forgive him! He would
join us, now he finds
What the King counts reward! The pardon, too, 325
Should be your own. Yourself should bear to
Strafford

The pardon of the Commons.

Pym. Meet him? Strafford?
Have we to meet once more, then? Be it so!
And yet—the prophecy seemed half fulfilled
When, at the Trial, as he gazed, my youth, 330
Our friendship, divers thoughts came back at once
And left me, for a time . . . 'T is very sad!
To-morrow we discuss the points of law
With Lane—to-morrow?

Vane. Not before to-morrow—
So, time enough! I knew you would relent! 335

Pym. The next day, Haselrig, you introduce
The Bill of his Attainder. Pray for me!

The KING

Well, Carlisle?

76

Pym.

Sufficiently.

I would apprise you of the novel course
The People take : the Trial fails.

Charles.

Yes, yes :

We are aware, sir : for your part in it 360
Means shall be found to thank you.

Pym.

Pray you, read

This schedule ! I would learn from your own
mouth

—(It is a matter much concerning me)—

Whether, if two Estates of us concede
The death of Strafford, on the grounds set forth 365
Within that parchment, you, sir, can resolve
To grant your own consent to it. This Bill
Is framed by me. If you determine, sir,
That England's manifested will should guide
Your judgment, ere another week such will 370
Shall manifest itself. If not,—I cast
Aside the measure.

Charles.

You can hinder, then,

The introduction of this Bill ?

Pym.

I can.

Charles. He is my friend, sir : I have wronged
him : mark you,

Had I not wronged him, this might be. You think 375
Because you hate the Earl . . . (turn not away,
We know you hate him)—no one else could love
Strafford : but he has saved me, some affirm.
Think of his pride ! And do you know one strange,
One frightful thing ? We all have used the man 380
As though a drudge of ours, with not a source
Of happy thoughts except in us ; and yet
Strafford has wife and children, household cares,
Just as if we had never been. Ah sir,
You are moved, even you, a solitary man 385
Wed to your cause—to England if you will !

Pym. Yes—think, my soul—to England! Draw not back!

Charles. Prevent that Bill, sir! All your course seems fair

Till now. Why, in the end, 't is I should sign
The warrant for his death! You have said much 390
I ponder on; I never meant, indeed,
Strafford should serve me any more. I take
The Commons' counsel; but this Bill is yours—
Nor worthy of its leader: care not, sir,
For that, however! I will quite forget 395
You named it to me. You are satisfied?

Pym. Listen to me, sir! Eliot laid his hand,
Wasted and white upon my forehead once;
Wentworth—he's gone now!—has talked on, whole
nights,

And I beside him; Hampden loves me: sir, 400
How can I breathe and not wish England well,
And her King well?

Charles. I thank you, sir, who leave
That King his servant. Thanks, sir!

Pym. Let me speak
—Who may not speak again; whose spirit yearns
For a cool night after this weary day: 405
—Who would not have my soul turn sicker yet
In a new task, more fatal, more august,
More full of England's utter weal or woe.
I thought, sir, could I find myself with you,
After this trial, alone, as man to man— 410
I might say something, warn you, pray you, save—
Mark me, King Charles, save—you!
But God must do it. Yet I warn you, sir—
(With Strafford's faded eyes yet full on me)
As you would have no deeper question moved 415
—"How long the Many must endure the One,"
Assure me, sir, if England give assent

To Strafford's death, you will not interfere !
Or——

Charles. God forsakes me. I am in a net
And cannot move. Let all be as you say !

420

Enter Lady CARLISLE

Lady Carlisle. He loves you—looking beautiful
with joy

Because you sent me ! he would spare you all
The pain ! he never dreamed you would forsake
Your servant in the evil day—nay, see
Your scheme returned ! That generous heart
of his !

425

He needs it not—or, needing it, disdains
A course that might endanger you—you, sir,
Whom Strafford from his inmost soul . . .

[*Seeing Pym.*]

Well met !

No fear for Strafford ! All that 's true and brave
On your own side shall help us : we are now
Stronger than ever.

430

Ha—what, sir, is this ?
All is not well ! What parchment have you there ?

Pym. Sir, much is saved us both.

Lady Carlisle.

This Bill ! Your lip

Whitens—you could not read one line to me
Your voice would falter so !

Pym.

No recreant yet !

435

The great word went from England to my soul,
And I arose. The end is very near.

Lady Carlisle. I am to save him ! All have shrunk
beside ;

'T is only I am left. Heaven will make strong

The hand now as the heart. Then let both die !

440

ACT V

SCENE I.—*Whitehall*

HOLLIS, Lady CARLISLE

Hollis. Tell the King then ! Come in with me !

Lady Carlisle. Not so !

He must not hear till it succeeds.

Hollis. Succeed ?

Nodream was half so vain—you'd rescue Strafford
And outwit Pym ! I cannot tell you . . . lady,
The block pursues me, and the hideous show. 5

To-day . . . is it to-day ? And all the while
He's sure of the King's pardon. Think, I have
To tell this man he is to die. The King
May rend his hair, for me ! I'll not see Strafford !

Lady Carlisle. Only, if I succeed, remember—
Charles 10

Has saved him. He would hardly value life
Unless his gift. My staunch friends wait. Go in—
You must go in to Charles !

Hollis. And all beside
Left Strafford long ago. The King has signed
The warrant for his death ! the Queen was sick 15
Of the eternal subject. For the Court,—
The Trial was amusing in its way,
Only too much of it : the Earl withdrew
In time. But you, fragile, alone, so young
Amid rude mercenaries—you devise 20
A plan to save him ! Even though it fails,
What shall reward you ?

Lady Carlisle. I may go, you think,
 To France with him? And you reward me, friend,
 Who lived with Strafford even from his youth
 Before he set his heart on state-affairs 25
 And they bent down that noble brow of his.
 I have learned somewhat of his latter life,
 And all the future I shall know : but, Hollis,
 I ought to make his youth my own as well.
 Tell me,—when he is saved!

Hollis. My gentle friend, 30
 He should know all and love you, but 't is vain!

Lady Carlisle. Love? no—too late now! Let
 him love the King!
 'T is the King's scheme! I have your word, re-
 member!

We 'll keep the old delusion up. But, quick!
 Quick! Each of us has work to do, beside! 35
 Go to the King! I hope—Hollis—I hope!
 Say nothing of my scheme! Hush, while we speak
 Think where he is! Now for my gallant friends!

Hollis. Where he is? Calling wildly upon
 Charles,
 Guessing his fate, pacing the prison-floor. 40
 Let the King tell him! I 'll not look on Strafford.

SCENE II.—*The Tower*

STRAFFORD *sitting with his Children. They sing*

*O bell' andare
 Per barca in mare,
 Verso la sera
 Di Primavera!* 45

William. The boat 's in the broad moonlight all
 this while—

*Verso la sera
 Di Primavera!*

And the boat shoots from underneath the moon
Into the shadowy distance ; only still 50
You hear the dipping oar—

Verso la sera,

And faint, and fainter, and then all 's quite gone,
Music and light and all, like a lost star.

Anne. But you should sleep, father : you were
to sleep.

Strafford. I do sleep, Anne ; or if not—you 55
must know

There 's such a thing as . . .

William. You 're too tired to sleep ?

Strafford. It will come by-and-by and all day
long,

In that old quiet house I told you of :

We sleep safe there.

Anne. Why not in Ireland ?

Strafford. No ! 60

Too many dreams !—That song 's for Venice,
William :

You know how Venice looks upon the map—
Isles that the mainland hardly can let go ?

William. You 've been to Venice, father ?

Strafford. I was young, then.

William. A city with no King ; that 's why I like 65
Even a song that comes from Venice.

Strafford. William !

William. Oh, I know why ! Anne, do you love
the King ?

But I 'll see Venice for myself one day.

Strafford. See many lands, boy—England last
of all,—

That way you 'll love her best.

William. Why do men say 70

You sought to ruin her then ?

Strafford.

Ah,—they say that.

William. Why?

Strafford. I suppose they must have words to say,
As you to sing.

Anne. But they make songs beside :
Last night I heard one, in the street beneath,
That called you . . . Oh, the names !

William. Don't mind her, father ! 75
They soon left off when I cried out to them.

Strafford. We shall so soon be out of it, my boy !
'T is not worth while : who heeds a foolish song ?

William. Why, not the King.

Strafford. Well : it has been the fate
Of better ; and yet,—wherefore not feel sure 80
That Time, who in the twilight comes to mend
All the fantastic day's caprice, consign
To the low ground once more the ignoble Term,
And raise the Genius on his orb again,—
That Time will do me right ?

Anne. (Shall we sing, William ? 85
He does not look thus when we sing.)

Strafford For Ireland,
Something is done : too little, but enough
To show what might have been.

William. (I have no heart
To sing now ! Anne, how very sad he looks !
Oh, I so hate the King for all he says !) 90

Strafford. Forsook them ! What, the common
songs will run

That I forsook the People ? Nothing more ?
Ay, Fame, the busy scribe, will pause, no doubt,
Turning a deaf ear to her thousand slaves
Noisy to be enrolled,—will register 95

The curious glosses, subtle notices,
Ingenious clearings-up one fain would see
Beside that plain inscription of The Name—

The Patriot Pym, or the Apostate Strafford !
[*The Children resume their song timidly, but break off.*

Enter HOLLIS and an Attendant

Strafford. No,—Hollis? in good time!—Who is he?

Hollis.

One 100

That must be present.

Strafford. Ah—I understand.

They will not let me see poor Laud alone.
How politic! They 'd use me by degrees
To solitude : and, just as you came in,
I was solicitous what life to lead
When Strafford 's “not so much as Constable
“In the King's service.” Is there any means
To keep oneself awake? What would you do
After this bustle, Hollis, in my place?

105

Hollis. Strafford!

Strafford. Observe, not but that Pym and you 110
Will find me news enough—news I shall hear
Under a quince-tree by a fish-pond side
At Wentworth. Garrard must be re-engaged
My newsman. Or, a better project now—
What if when all 's consummated, and the Saints 115
Reign, and the Senate's work goes swimmingly,—
What if I venture up, some day, unseen,
To saunter through the Town, notice how Pym,
Your Tribune, likes Whitehall, drop quietly
Into a tavern, hear a point discussed, 120
As, whether Strafford's name were John or James—
And be myself appealed to—I, who shall
Myself have near forgotten!

Hollis.

I would speak . . .

Strafford. Then you shall speak,—not now.

I want just now,

To hear the sound of my own tongue. This place 125
Is full of ghosts.

Hollis. Nay, you must hear me, Strafford!

Strafford. Oh, readily! Only, one rare thing
more,—

The minister! Who will advise the King,
Turn his Sejanus, Richelieu and what not,
And yet have health—children, for aught I know— 130
My patient pair of traitors! Ah,—but, William—
Does not his cheek grow thin?

William. 'T is you look thin,
Father!

Strafford. A scamper o'er the breezy wolds
Sets all to-rights.

Hollis. You cannot sure forget
A prison-roof is o'er you, Strafford?

Strafford. No, 135
Why, no. I would not touch on that, the first.
I left you that. Well, Hollis? Say at once,
The King can find no time to set me free!
A mask at Theobald's?

Hollis. Hold: no such affair
Detains him.

Strafford. True: what needs so great a matter? 140
The Queen's lip may be sore. Well: when he
pleases,—

Only, I want the air: it vexes flesh
To be pent up so long.

Hollis. The King—I bear
His message, Strafford: pray you, let me speak!

Strafford. Go, William! Anne, try o'er your
song again! [The Children retire. 145]
They shall be loyal, friend, at all events.

I know your message: you have nothing new
To tell me: from the first I guessed as much.
I know, instead of coming here himself,

Leading me forth in public by the hand, 150
The King prefers to leave the door ajar
As though I were escaping—bids me trudge
While the mob gapes upon some show prepared
On the other side of the river! Give at once
His order of release! I've heard, as well, 155
Of certain poor manœuvres to avoid
The granting pardon at his proper risk;
First, he must prattle somewhat to the Lords,
Must talk a trifle with the Commons first,
Be grieved I should abuse his confidence, 160
And far from blaming them, and . . . Where 's
the order?

Hollis. Spare me!

Strafford. Why, he'd not have me steal away?
With an old doublet and a steeple hat
Like Prynne's? Besmuggled into France, perhaps?
Hollis, 't is for my children! 'T was for them 165
I first consented to stand day by day
And give your Puritans the best of words,
Be patient, speak when called upon, observe
Their rules, and not return them prompt their lie!
What 's in that boy of mine that he should prove 170
Son to a prison-breaker? I shall stay
And he'll stay with me. Charles should know as
much,

He too has children!

[*Turning to HOLLIS's Companion.*] Sir, you feel
for me!

No need to hide that face! Though it have looked
Upon me from the judgment-seat . . . I know 175
Strangely, that somewhere it has looked on me . . .
Your coming has my pardon, nay, my thanks:
For there is one who comes not.

Hollis.

Whom forgive,

As one to die!

Strafford. True, all die, and all need
Forgiveness : I forgive him from my soul. 180

Hollis. 'T is a world's wonder : Strafford, you
must die !

Strafford. Sir, if your errand is to set me free
This heartless jest mars much. Ha ! Tears in truth ?
We 'll end this ! See this paper, warm—feel—warm
With lying next my heart ! Whose hand is there ? 185
Whose promise ? Read, and loud for God to hear !
"Strafford shall take no hurt"—read it, I say !
"In person, honour, nor estate"—

Hollis. The King . . .

Strafford. I could unking him by a breath !
You sit

Where Loudon sat, who came to prophesy 190
The certain end, and offer me Pym's grace
If I 'd renounce the King : and I stood firm
On the King's faith. The King who lives . . .

Hollis. To sign

The warrant for your death.

Strafford. "Put not your trust

"In princes, neither in the sons of men, 195
"In whom is no salvation !"

Hollis. Trust in God !

The scaffold is prepared : they wait for you :
He has consented. Cast the earth behind !

Charles. You would not see me, Strafford, at
your foot !

It was wrung from me ! Only, curse me not ! 200

Hollis [to STRAFFORD]. As you hope grace and
pardon in your need,

Be merciful to this most wretched man.

[*Voices from within.*]

Strafford. You 'll be good to those children, sir?

I know

You 'll not believe her, even should the Queen

Think they take after one they rarely saw.

I had intended that my son should live

A stranger to these matters : but you are

So utterly deprived of friends ! He too

Must serve you—will you not be good to him ?

Or, stay, sir, do not promise—do not swear !

You, Hollis—do the best you can for me !

I 've not a soul to trust to : Wandesford 's dead,

And you 've got Radcliffe safe, Laud's turn comes

next :

I 've found small time of late for my affairs,

But I trust any of you, Pym himself—

No one could hurt them : there 's an infant, too.

These tedious cares ! Your Majesty could spare
them.

Nay—pardon me, my King ! I had forgotten

Your education, trials, much temptation,

Some weakness : there escaped a peevish word—

'T is gone : I bless you at the last. You know

All 's between you and me : what has the world

To do with it ? Farewell !

Charles [at the door].

Balfour ! Balfour !

Enter BALFOUR

The Parliament !—go to them : I grant all

Demands. Their sittings shall be permanent :

Tell them to keep their money if they will :

I 'll come to them for every coat I wear

And every crust I eat : only I choose

To pardon Strafford. As the Queen shall choose !

—You never heard the People howl for blood,

Beside !

Balfour. Your Majesty may hear them now :
The walls can hardly keep their murmurs out :
Please you retire !

Charles. Take all the troops, Balfour ! 235

Balfour. There are some hundred thousand of
the crowd.

Charles. Come with me, Strafford ! You 'll not
fear, at least !

Strafford. Balfour, say nothing to the world of
this !

I charge you, as a dying man, forget
You gazed upon this agony of one . . . 240

Of one . . . or if . . . why you may say, Balfour,
The King was sorry : 't is no shame in him :

Yes, you may say he even wept, Balfour,
And that I walked the lighter to the block
Because of it. I shall walk lightly, sir ! 245

Earth fades, heaven breaks on me : I shall stand
next

Before God's throne : the moment 's close at hand

When man the first, last time, has leave to lay

His whole heart bare before its Maker, leave

To clear up the long error of a life 250

And choose one happiness for evermore.

With all mortality about me, Charles,

The sudden wreck, the dregs of violent death—

What if, despite the opening angel-song,

There penetrate one prayer for you ? Be saved 255

Through me ! Bear witness, no one could prevent

My death ! Lead on ! ere he awake—best, now !

All must be ready : did you say, Balfour,

The crowd began to murmur ? They 'll be kept

Too late for sermon at St. Antholin's ! 260

Now ! But tread softly—children are at play

In the next room. Precede ! I follow—

Enter Lady CARLISLE, with many Attendants

Lady Carlisle.

Me!

Follow me, Strafford, and be saved! The King?
[*To the KING.*] Well—as you ordered, they are
ranged without,

The convoy . . . [*seeing the KING's state.*]

[*To STRAFFORD.*] You know all, then! Why, I
thought

It looked best that the King should save you,—
Charles

Alone; 't is a shame that you should owe me aught.
Or no, not shame! Strafford, you'll not feel shame
At being saved by me?

Hollis.

All true! Oh Strafford,

She saves you! all her deed! this lady's deed!

And is the boat in readiness? You, friend,
Are Billingsley, no doubt. Speak to her, Strafford!
See how she trembles, waiting for your voice!

The world's to learn its bravest story yet.

Lady Carlisle. Talk afterward! Long nights
in France enough,

To sit beneath the vines and talk of home.

Strafford. You love me, child? Ah, Strafford
can be loved

As well as Vane! I could escape, then?

Lady Carlisle.

Haste!

Advance the torches, Bryan!

Strafford.

I will die.

They call me proud: but England had no right,
When she encountered me—her strength to mine—
To find the chosen foe a craven. Girl,

I fought her to the utterance, I fell,
I am her's now, and I will die. Beside,

The lookers-on! Eliot is all about

This place, with his most uncomplaining brow.

Lady Carlisle. Strafford!

Strafford. I think if you could know how much I love you, you would be repaid, my friend!

Lady Carlisle. Then, for my sake!

Strafford. Even for your sweet sake, I stay.

Hollis. For *their* sake!

Strafford. To bequeath a stain? 290
Leave me! Girl, humour me and let me die!

Lady Carlisle. Bid him escape—wake, King!
Bid him escape!

Strafford. True, I will go! Die, and forsake the King?

I'll not draw back from the last service.

Lady Carlisle. Strafford!

Strafford. And, after all, what is disgrace to me? 295

Let us come, child! That it should end this way!
Lead then! but I feel strangely: it was not
To end this way.

Lady Carlisle. Lean—lean on me!

Strafford. My King!

Oh, had he trusted me—his friend of friends!

Lady Carlisle. I can support him, Hollis!

Strafford. Not this way! 300

This gate—I dreamed of it, this very gate.

Lady Carlisle. It opens on the river: our good boat

Is moored below, our friends are there.

Strafford. The same:

Only with something ominous and dark,
Fatal, inevitable.

Lady Carlisle. Strafford! Strafford! 305

Strafford. Not by this gate! I feel what will be there!

I dreamed of it, I tell you: touch it not!

Lady Carlisle. To save the King,—Strafford, to save the King!

[*As STRAFFORD opens the door, PYM is discovered with HAMPDEN, VANE, etc. STRAFFORD falls back; PYM follows slowly and confronts him.*

Pym. Have I done well? Speak, England!
Whose sole sake

I still have laboured for, with disregard 310
To my own heart,—for whom my youth was made
Barren, my manhood waste, to offer up
Her sacrifice—this friend, this Wentworth here—
Who walked in youth with me, loved me, it may be,
And whom, for his forsaking England's cause, 315
I hunted by all means (trusting that she
Would sanctify all means) even to the block
Which waits for him. And saying this, I feel
No bitterer pang than first I felt, the hour
I swore that Wentworth might leave us, but I 320
Would never leave him: I do leave him now.
I render up my charge (be witness, God!)
To England who imposed it. I have done
Her bidding—poorly, wrongly,—it may be,
With ill effects—for I am weak, a man: 325
Still, I have done my best, my human best,
Not faltering for a moment. It is done.
And this said, if I say . . . yes, I will say
I never loved but one man—David not
More Jonathan! Even thus, I love him now: 330
And look for my chief portion in that world
Where great hearts led astray are turned again,
(Soon it may be, and, certes, will be soon:
My mission over, I shall not live long,)—
Ay, here I know I talk—I dare and must, 335
Of England, and her great reward, as all
I look for there; but in my inmost heart,

Believe, I think of stealing quite away
To walk once more with Wentworth—my youth's
friend

Purged from all error, gloriously renewed, 340
And Eliot shall not blame us. Then indeed . . .
This is no meeting, Wentworth! Tears increase
Too hot. A thin mist—is it blood?—enwraps
The face I loved once. Then, the meeting be!

Strafford. I have loved England too; we'll meet
then, Pym. 345

As well die now! Youth is the only time
To think and to decide on a great course:
Manhood with action follows; but 't is dreary,
To have to alter our whole life in age—
The time past, the strength gone! As well die now. 350
When we meet, Pym, I'd be set right—not now!
Best die. Then if there's any fault, fault too
Dies, smothered up. Poor grey old little Laud
May dream his dream out, of a perfect Church,
In some blind corner. And there's no one left. 355
I trust the King now wholly to you, Pym!
And yet, I know not: I shall not be there:
Friends fail—if he have any. And he's weak,
And loves the Queen, and . . . Oh, my fate is
nothing—

Nothing! But not that awful head—not that! 360

Pym. If England shall declare such will to me . . .

Strafford. Pym, you help England! I, that am
to die,

What I must see! 't is here—all here! My God,
Let me but gasp out, in one word of fire,
How thou wilt plague him, satiating hell! 365
What? England that you help, become through
you

A green and putrefying charnel, left
Our children . . . some of us have children, Pym—

Some who, without that, still must ever wear
 A darkened brow, an over-serious look, 370
 And never properly be young! No word?
 What if I curse you? Send a strong curse forth
 Clothed from my heart, lapped round with horror
 till

She 's fit with her white face to walk the world
 Scaring kind natures from your cause and you— 375
 Then to sit down with you at the board-head,
 The gathering for prayer . . . O speak, but speak!
 . . . Creep up, and quietly follow each one home,
 You, you, you, be a nestling care for each
 To sleep with,—hardly moaning in his dreams, 380
 She gnaws so quietly,—till, lo he starts,
 Gets off with half a heart eaten away!
 Oh, shall you 'scape with less if she 's my child?
 You will not say a word—to me—to Him?

Pym. If England shall declare such will to
 me . . . 385

Strafford. No, not for England now, not for
 Heaven now,—

See, Pym, for my sake, mine who kneel to you!
 There, I will thank you for the death, my friend!
 This is the meeting: let me love you well!

Pym. England,—I am thine own! Dost thou
 exact 390

That service? I obey thee to the end.

Strafford. O God, I shall die first—I shall die
 first!

PIPPA PASSES

A DRAMA

I DEDICATE MY BEST INTENTIONS, IN THIS POEM,
ADMIRINGLY TO THE AUTHOR OF "ION,"
AFFECTIONATELY TO MR. SERGEANT TALFOURD.

R. B.

LONDON: 1841.

PERSONS

PIPPA

OTTIMA

SEBALD

Foreign Students

GOTTLIEB

SCHRAMM

JULES

PHENE

Austrian Police

BLUPHOCKS

LUIGI *and his Mother*

Poor Girls

MONSIGNOR *and his Attendants*

PIPPA PASSES

1841

INTRODUCTION

NEW YEAR'S DAY AT ASOLO IN THE TREVISAN

SCENE.—*A large mean airy chamber. A girl, PIPPA,
from the Silk-mills, springing out of bed*

DAY!

Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last :
Boils, pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
Where spurting and suppressed it lay, 5
For not a froth-flake touched the rim
Of yonder gap in the solid gray
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away ;
But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed, 10
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then overflowed
the world.

Oh, Day, if I squander a wavelet of thee,
A mite of my twelve hours' treasure,
The least of thy gazes or glances, 15
(Be they grants thou art bound to or gifts above
measure)
One of thy choices or one of thy chances,

(Be they tasks God imposed thee or freaks at thy pleasure)

—My Day, if I squander such labour or leisure,
Then shame fall on Asolo, mischief on me! 20

Thy long blue solemn hours serenely flowing,
Whence earth, we feel, gets steady help and good—

Thy fitful sunshine-minutes, coming, going,
As if earth turned from work in gamesome mood—
All shall be mine! But thou must treat me not 25

As prosperous ones are treated, those who live
At hand here, and enjoy the higher lot,
In readiness to take what thou wilt give,
And free to let alone what thou refusest;

For, Day, my holiday, if thou ill-usest 30

Me, who am only Pippa,—old-year's sorrow,
Cast off last night, will come again to-morrow :
Whereas, if thou prove gentle, I shall borrow
Sufficient strength of thee for new-year's sorrow.

All other men and women that this earth 35

Belongs to, who all days alike possess,
Make general plenty cure particular dearth,
Get more joy one way, if another, less :

Thou art my single day, God lends to leaven
What were all earth else, with a feel of heaven,— 40

Solelight that helps me through the year, thy sun's!
Try now! Take Asolo's Four Happiest Ones—

And let thy morning rain on that superb
Great haughty Ottima; can rain disturb
Her Sebald's homage? All the while thy rain 45

Beats fiercest on her shrub-house window-pane,
He will but press the closer, breathe more warm
Against her cheek; how should she mind the storm?

And, morning past, if mid-day shed a gloom
O'er Jules and Phene,—what care bride and groom 50

Save for their dear selves? 'T is their marriage-day ;

And while they leave church and go home their way,
Hand clasping hand, within each breast would be
Sunbeams and pleasant weather spite of thee.

Then, for another trial, obscure thy eve 55

With mist,—will Luigi and his mother grieve—

The lady and her child, unmatched, forsooth,

She in her age, as Luigi in his youth,

For true content? The cheerful town, warm, close 60
And safe, the sooner that thou art morose,

Receives them. And yet once again, outbreak

In storm at night on Monsignor, they make

Such stir about,—whom they expect from Rome

To visit Asolo, his brother's home,

And say here masses proper to release 65

A soul from pain,—what storm dares hurt his peace?

Calm would he pray, with his own thoughts to ward

Thy thunder off, nor want the angels' guard.

But Pippa—just one such mischance would spoil

Her day that lightens the next twelvemonth's toil 70

At wearisome silk-winding, coil on coil !

And here I let time slip for nought !

Aha, you foolhardy sunbeam, caught

With a single splash from my ewer !

You that would mock the best pursuer, 75

Was my basin over-deep ?

One splash of water ruins you asleep,

And up, up, fleet your brilliant bits

Wheeling and counterwheeling,

Reeling, broken beyond healing : 80

Now grow together on the ceiling !

That will task your wits.

Whoever it was quenched fire first, hoped to see

Morsel after morsel flee

As merrily, as giddily . . . 85

Meantime, what lights my sunbeam on,
Where settles by degrees the radiant cripple?
Oh, is it surely blown, my martagon?
New-blown and ruddy as St. Agnes' nipple,
Plump as the flesh-bunch on some Turk bird's poll! 90
Be sure if corals, branching 'neath the ripple
Of ocean, bud there,—fairies watch unroll
Such turban-flowers; I say, such lamps disperse
Thick red flame through that dusk green universe!
I am queen of thee, floweret! 95
And each fleshy blossom
Preserve I not—(safer
Than leaves that embower it,
Or shells that embosom)
—From weevil and chafer? 100
Laugh through my pane then; solicit the bee;
Gibe him, be sure; and, in midst of thy glee,
Love thy queen, worship me!

—Worship whom else? For am I not, this day,
Whate'er I please? What shall I please to-day? 105
My morn, noon, eve and night—how spend my day?
To-morrow I must be Pippa who winds silk,
The whole year round, to earn just bread and
milk:

But, this one day, I have leave to go,
And play out my fancy's fullest games; 110
I may fancy all day—and it shall be so—
That I taste of the pleasures, am called by the
names
Of the Happiest Four in our Asolo!

See! Up the hill-side yonder, through the
morning,
Some one shall love me, as the world calls love: 115
I am no less than Ottima, take warning!

The gardens, and the great stone house above,
And other house for shrubs, all glass in front,
Are mine ; where Sebald steals, as he is wont,
To court me, while old Luca yet reposes : 120
And therefore, till the shrub-house door uncloses,
I . . . what now ?—give abundant cause for prate
About me—Ottima, I mean—of late,
Too bold, too confident she 'll still face down
The spitefullest of talkers in our town. 125
How we talk in the little town below !

But love, love, love—there 's better love, I
know !

This foolish love was only day's first offer ;
I choose my next love to defy the scoffer :
For do not our Bride and Bridegroom sally 130
Out of Possagno church at noon ?
Their house looks over Orcana valley :
Why should not I be the bride as soon
As Ottima ? For I saw, beside,
Arrive last night that little bride— 135
Saw, if you call it seeing her, one flash
Of the pale snow-pure cheek and black bright
tresses,

Blacker than all except the black eyelash ;
I wonder she contrives those lids no dresses !
—So strict was she, the veil 140
Should cover close her pale
Pure cheeks—a bride to look at and scarce touch,
Scarce touch, remember, Jules ! For are not such
Used to be tended, flower-like, every feature,
As if one's breath would fray the lily of a creature ? 145
A soft and easy life these ladies lead :
Whiteness in us were wonderful indeed.
Oh, save that brow its virgin dimness,
Keep that foot its lady primness,
Let those ankles never swerve 150

From their exquisite reserve,
 Yet have to trip along the streets like me,
 All but naked to the knee !
 How will she ever grant her Jules a bliss
 So startling as her real first infant kiss ? 155
 Oh, no—not envy, this !

—Not envy, sure !—for if you gave me
 Leave to take or to refuse,
 In earnest, do you think I 'd choose
 That sort of new love to enslave me ? 160
 Mine should have lapped me round from the
 beginning ;

As little fear of losing it as winning :
 Lovers grow cold, men learn to hate their wives,
 And only parents' love can last our lives.

At eve the Son and Mother, gentle pair, 165
 Commune inside our turret : what prevents

My being Luigi ? While that mossy lair
 Of lizards through the winter-time is stirred

With each to each imparting sweet intents
 For this new-year, as brooding bird to bird— 170
 (For I observe of late, the evening walk

Of Luigi and his mother, always ends
 Inside our ruined turret, where they talk,

Calmer than lovers, yet more kind than friends)
 —Let me be cared about, kept out of harm, 175
 And schemed for, safe in love as with a charm ;

Let me be Luigi ! If I only knew

What was my mother's face—my father, too !

Nay, if you come to that, best love of all
 Is God's ; then why not have God's love befall 180
 Myself as, in the palace by the Dome,

Monsignor ?—who to-night will bless the home
 Of his dead brother ; and God bless in turn

That heart which beats, those eyes which mildly burn

With love for all men! I, to-night at least, 185
 Would be that holy and beloved priest.

Now wait!—even I already seem to share
 In God's love: what does New-year's hymn
 declare?

What other meaning do these verses bear?

All service ranks the same with God : 190
If now, as formerly he trod
Paradise, his presence fills
Our earth, each only as God wills
Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,
Are we ; there is no last nor first. 195

Say not "a small event!" Why "small" ?
Costs it more pain that this, ye call
A "great event," should come to pass,
Than that? Untwine me from the mass
Of deeds which make up life, one deed 200
Power shall fall short in or exceed !

And more of it, and more of it!—oh yes—
 I will pass each, and see their happiness,
 And envy none—being just as great, no doubt,
 Useful to men, and dear to God, as they ! 205
 A pretty thing to care about
 So mightily, this single holiday !
 But let the sun shine ! Wherefore repine ?
 —With thee to lead me, O Day of mine,
 Down the grass path grey with dew, 210
 Under the pine-wood, blind with boughs,
 Where the swallow never flew
 Nor yet cicala dared carouse—
 No, dared carouse ! [She enters the street.

PART I

MORNING

SCENE.—*Up the Hill-side, inside the Shrub-house.*
LUCA'S wife, OTTIMA, and her paramour, the
German SEBALD

Sebald [*sings*].

*Let the watching lids wink !
Day's a-blaze with eyes, think !
Deep into the night, drink !*

Ottima. Night? Such may be your Rhine-
land nights perhaps ;
But this blood-red beam through the shutter's chink 5
—We call such light, the morning : let us see !
Mind how you grope your way, though ! How
these tall
Naked geraniums straggle ! Push the lattice
Behind that frame !—Nay, do I bid you?—Sebald,
It shakes the dust down on me ! Why, of course 10
The slide-bolt catches. Well, are you content,
Or must I find you something else to spoil ?
Kiss and befriends, my Sebald ! Is 't full morning ?
Oh, don't speak then !

Sebald. Ay, thus it used to be.
Ever your house was, I remember, shut 15
Till mid-day ; I observed that, as I strolled
On mornings through the vale here ; country girls
Were noisy, washing garments in the brook,
Hinds drove the slow white oxen up the hills :

But no, your house was mute, would ope no eye. 20
 And wisely : you were plotting one thing there,
 Nature, another outside. I looked up—
 Rough white wood shutters, rusty iron bars,
 Silent as death, blind in a flood of light.

Oh, I remember !—and the peasants laughed 25
 And said, “The old man sleeps with the young wife.”
 This house was his, this chair, this window—his.

Ottima. Ah, the clear morning ! I can see St.
 Mark's ;

That black streak is the belfry. Stop : Vicenza
 Should lie . . . there 's Padua, plain enough,
 that blue ! 30

Look o'er my shoulder, follow my finger !

Sebald. Morning ?

It seems to me a night with a sun added.

Where 's dew, where 's freshness ? That bruised
 plant, I bruised

In getting through the lattice yestereve,
 Droops as it did. See, here 's my elbow's mark 35
 I' the dust o' the sill.

Ottima. Oh, shut the lattice, pray !

Sebald. Let me lean out. I cannot scent blood
 here,

Foul as the morn may be.

There, shut the world out !

How do you feel now, *Ottima* ? There, curse
 The world and all outside ! Let us throw off 40
 This mask : how do you bear yourself ? Let 's out
 With all of it.

Ottima. Best never speak of it.

Sebald. Best speak again and yet again of it,
 Till words cease to be more than words. “His
 blood,”

For instance—let those two words mean “His
 blood”

And nothing more. Notice, I 'll say them now,
 "His blood."

Ottima. Assuredly if I repented
 The deed—

Sebald. Repent? Who should repent, or why?
 What puts that in your head? Did I once say
 That I repented?

Ottima. No, I said the deed . . . 50

Sebald. "The deed" and "the event"—just
 now it was

"Our passion's fruit"—the devil take such cant!
 Say, once and always, Luca was a wittol,
 I am his cut-throat, you are . . .

Ottima. Here's the wine;
 I brought it when we left the house above, 55
 And glasses too—wine of both sorts. Black?
 White then?

Sebald. But am not I his cut-throat? What are
 you?

Ottima. There trudges on his business from the
 Duomo

Benet the Capuchin, with his brown hood
 And bare feet; always in one place at church, 60
 Close under the stone wall by the south entry.
 I used to take him for a brown cold piece
 Of the wall's self, as out of it he rose
 To let me pass—at first, I say, I used:
 Now, so has that dumb figure fastened on me, 65
 I rather should account the plastered wall
 A piece of him, so chilly does it strike.
 This, Sebald?

Sebald. No, the white wine—the white wine!
 Well, Ottima, I promised no new year
 Should rise on us the ancient shameful way; 70
 Nor does it rise. Pour on! To your black eyes!
 Do you remember last damned New Year's day?

Ottima. You brought those foreign prints. We
looked at them

Over the wine and fruit. I had to scheme
To get him from the fire. Nothing but saying 75
His own set wants the proof-mark, roused him up
To hunt them out.

Sebald. 'Faith, he is not alive
To fondle you before my face.

Ottima. Do you
Fondle me then! Who means to take your life
For that, my Sebald?

Sebald. Hark you, *Ottima*! 80
One thing to guard against. We'll not make much
One of the other—that is, not make more
Parade of warmth, childish officious coil,
Than yesterday: as if, sweet, I supposed
Proof upon proof were needed now, now first, 85
To show I love you—yes, still love you—love you
In spite of Luca and what's come to him
—Sure sign we had him ever in our thoughts,
White sneering old reproachful face and all!
We'll even quarrel, love, at times, as if 90
We still could lose each other, were not tied
By this: conceive you?

Ottima. Love!

Sebald. Not tied so sure.
Because though I was wrought upon, have struck
His insolence back into him—am I
So surely yours?—therefore forever yours? 95

Ottima. Love, to be wise, (one counsel pays
another)

Should we have—months ago, when first we loved,
For instance that May morning we two stole
Under the green ascent of sycamores—
If we had come upon a thing like that 100
Suddenly . . .

Sebald. "A thing"—there again—"a thing!"

Ottima. Then, Venus' body, had we come upon
My husband Luca Gaddi's murdered corpse
Within there, at his couch-foot, covered close—
Would you have pored upon it? Why persist 105
In poring now upon it? For 't is here
As much as there in the deserted house :
You cannot rid your eyes of it. For me,
Now he is dead I hate him worse : I hate . . .
Dare you stay here? I would go back and hold 110
His two dead hands, and say, "I hate you worse,
"Luca, than . . ."

Sebald. Off, off—take your hands off mine,
'T is the hot evening—off! oh, morning is it?

Ottima. There 's one thing must be done ; you
know what thing.
Come in and help to carry. We may sleep 115
Anywhere in the whole wide house to-night.

Sebald. What would come, think you, if we let
him lie
Just as he is? Let him lie there until
The angels take him! He is turned by this
Off from his face beside, as you will see. 120

Ottima. This dusty pane might serve for looking
glass.

Three, four—four grey hairs! Is it so you said
A plait of hair should wave across my neck?
No—this way.

Sebald. Ottima, I would give your neck,
Each splendid shoulder, both those breasts of
yours, 125

That this were undone! Killing! Kill the world
So Luca lives again!—ay, lives to sputter
His fulsome dotage on you—yes, and feign
Surprise that I return at eve to sup,
When all the morning I was loitering here— 130

Bid me despatch my business and begone.

I would . . .

Ottima. See !

Sebald. No, I'll finish. Do you think
I fear to speak the bare truth once for all ?
All we have talked of, is, at bottom, fine
To suffer ; there 's a recompense in guilt ;
One must be venturous and fortunate : 135

What is one young for, else ? In age we 'll sigh
O'er the wild reckless wicked days flown over ;
Still, we have lived : the vice was in its place.

But to have eaten Luca's bread, have worn 140
His clothes, have felt his money swell my purse—
Do lovers in romances sin that way ?

Why, I was starving when I used to call
And teach you music, starving while you plucked
me

These flowers to smell !

Ottima. My poor lost friend !

Sebald. He gave me 145

Life, nothing less : what if he did reproach

My perfidy, and threaten, and do more—

Had he no right ? What was to wonder at ?

He sat by us at table quietly :

Why must you lean across till our cheeks touched ? 150

Could he do less than make pretence to strike ?

'T is not the crime's sake—I 'd commit ten crimes

Greater, to have this crime wiped out, undone !

And you—O how feel you ? Feel you for me ?

Ottima. Well then, I love you better now than
ever, 155

And best (look at me while I speak to you)—

Best for the crime ; nor do I grieve, in truth,

This mask, this simulated ignorance,

This affectation of simplicity,

Falls off our crime ; this naked crime of ours 160

May not now be looked over : look it down !
 Great ? let it be great ; but the joys it brought,
 Pay they or no its price ? Come : they or it !
 Speak not ! The past, would you give up the past
 Such as it is, pleasure and crime together ? 165
 Give up that noon I owned my love for you ?
 The garden's silence : even the single bee
 Persisting in his toil, suddenly stopped,
 And where he hid you only could surmise
 By some campanula chalice set a-swing. 170
 Who stammered—"Yes, I love you ?"

Sebald. And I drew
 Back ; put far back your face with both my hands
 Lest you should grow too full of me—your face
 So seemed athirst for my whole soul and body !

Ottima. And when I ventured to receive you
 here, 175
 Made you steal hither in the mornings—

Sebald. When
 I used to look up 'neath the shrub-house here,
 Till the red fire on its glazed windows spread
 To a yellow haze ?

Ottima. Ah—my sign was, the sun
 Inflamed the sere side of yon chestnut-tree 180
 Nipped by the first frost.

Sebald. You would always laugh
 At my wet boots : I had to stride thro' grass
 Over my ankles.

Ottima. Then our crowning night !

Sebald. The July night ?

Ottima. The day of it too, Sebald !
 When heaven's pillars seemed o'erbowed with heat, 185
 Its black-blue canopy suffered descend
 Close on us both, to weigh down each to each,
 And smother up all life except our life.
 So lay we till the storm came.

Sebald.

How it came !

Ottima. Buried in woods we lay, you recollect ; 190
 Swift ran the searching tempest overhead ;
 And ever and anon some bright white shaft
 Burned thro' the pine-tree roof, here burned and
 there,
 As if God's messenger thro' the close wood
 screen

Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture, 195
 Feeling for guilty thee and me : then broke
 The thunder like a whole sea overhead—

Sebald. Yes !

Ottima. —While I stretched myself upon
 you, hands

To hands, my mouth to your hot mouth, and shook
 All my locks loose, and covered you with them— 200
 You, Sebald, the same you !

*Sebald.*Slower, *Ottima* !*Ottima.* And as we lay—*Sebald.*

Less vehemently ! Love me !

Forgive me ! Take not words, mere words, to
 heart !

Your breath is worse than wine ! Breathe slow,
 speak slow !

Do not lean on me !

*Ottima.**Sebald*, as we lay,

205

Rising and falling only with our pants,
 Who said, " Let death come now ! 'T is right to
 die !

" Right to be punished ! Nought completes such
 bliss

" But woe ! " Who said that ?

Sebald.

How did we ever rise ?

Was 't that we slept ? Why did it end ?

Ottima.

I felt you 210

Taper into a point the ruffled ends

Of my loose locks 'twixt both your humid lips.
My hair is fallen now : knot it again !

Sebald. I kiss you now, dear Ottima, now and now !

This way ? Will you forgive me—be once more 215
My great queen ?

Ottima. Bind it thrice about my brow ;
Crown me your queen, your spirit's arbitress,
Magnificent in sin. Say that !

Sebald. I crown you
My great white queen, my spirit's arbitress,
Magnificent . . .

[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA, singing—* 220

*The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn ;
Morning's at seven ;
The hill-side's dew-pearled ;
The lark's on the wing ;
The snail's on the thorn :
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world !* 225

[*PIPPA passes.*

Sebald. God's in his heaven ! Do you hear
that ? Who spoke ?

You, you spoke !

Ottima. Oh—that little ragged girl ! 230
She must have rested on the step : we give them
But this one holiday the whole year round.

Did you ever see our silk-mills—their inside ?
There are ten silk-mills now belong to you.
She stoops to pick my double heartsease . . . Sh ! 235
She does not hear : call you out louder !

Sebald. Leave me !

Go, get your clothes on—dress those shoulders !

Ottima. Sebald ?

Sebald. Wipe off that paint ! I hate you.

Ottima. Miserable !

Sebald. My God, and she is emptied of it now !
 Outright now !—how miraculously gone 240
 All of the grace—had she not strange grace once ?
 Why, the blank cheek hangs listless as it likes
 No purpose holds the features up together,
 Only the cloven brow and puckered chin
 Stay in their places : and the very hair, 245
 That seemed to have a sort of life in it,
 Drops, a dead web !

Ottima. Speak to me—not of me !

Sebald. —That round great full-orbed face,
 where not an angle
 Broke the delicious indolence—all broken !

Ottima. To me—not of me ! Ungrateful, per-
 jured cheat ! 250
 A coward too : but ingrate 's worse than all.
 Beggar—my slave—a fawning, cringing lie !
 Leave me ! Betray me ! I can see your drift !
 A lie that walks and eats and drinks !

Sebald. My God !
 Those morbid olive faultless shoulder-blades— 255
 I should have known there was no blood beneath !

Ottima. You hate me then ? You hate me then ?

Sebald. To think
 She would succeed in her absurd attempt,
 And fascinate by sinning, show herself
 Superior—guilt from its excess superior 260
 To innocence ! That little peasant's voice
 Has righted all again. Though I be lost,
 I know which is the better, never fear,
 Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,
 Nature or trick ! I see what I have done, 265
 Entirely now ! Oh I am proud to feel
 Such torments—let the world take credit thence—
 I, having done my deed, pay too its price !
 I hate, hate—curse you ! God 's in his heaven !

Ottima.

—Me!

Me! no, no, Sebald, not yourself—kill me! 270

Mine is the whole crime. Do but kill me—then

Yourself—then—presently—first hear me speak!

I always meant to kill myself—wait, you!

Lean on my breast—not as a breast; don't love me

The more because you lean on me, my own 275

Heart's Sebald! There, there, both deaths presently!

Sebald. My brain is drowned now—quite drowned: all I feel

Is . . . is, at swift-recurring intervals,

A hurry-down within me, as of waters

Loosened to smother up some ghastly pit: 280

There they go—whirls from a black fiery sea!

Ottima. Not me—to him, O God, be merciful!

Talk by the way, while PIPPA is passing from the hill-side to Orcana. Foreign Students of painting and sculpture, from Venice, assembled opposite the house of JULES, a young French statuary, at Possagno

1st Student. Attention! My own post is beneath this window, but the pomegranate clump yonder will hide three or four of you with a little squeezing, and Schramm and his pipe must lie flat in the balcony. Four, five—who's a defaulter? 285
We want everybody, for Jules must not be suffered to hurt his bride when the jest's found out.

2nd Student. All here! Only our poet's away 290
—never having much meant to be present, moon-strike him! The airs of that fellow, that Giovacchino! He was in violent love with himself, and had a fair prospect of thriving in his suit, so unmolested was it,—when suddenly a woman falls in 295

love with him, too ; and out of pure jealousy he takes himself off to Trieste, immortal poem and all : whereto is this prophetic epitaph appended already, as Bluphocks assures me,—“*Here a mammoth-poem lies, Fouled to death by butterflies.*” 300
 His own fault, the simpleton ! Instead of cramp couplets, each like a knife in your entrails, he should write, says Bluphocks, both classically and intelligibly.—*Æsculapius, an Epic. Catalogue of the drugs: Hebe's plaister—One strip Cools your lip. 305*
Phœbus' emulsion—One bottle Clears your throttle. Mercury's bolus—One box Cures . . .

3rd Student. Subside, my fine fellow ! If the marriage was over by ten o'clock, Jules will certainly be here in a minute with his bride. 310

2nd Student. Good !—only, so should the poet's muse have been universally acceptable, says Bluphocks, *et canibus nostris . . .* and Delia not better known to our literary dogs than the boy Giovacchino ! 315

1st Student. To the point, now. Where's Gottlieb, the new-comer ? Oh,—listen, Gottlieb, to what has called down this piece of friendly vengeance on Jules, of which we now assemble to witness the winding-up. We are all agreed, 320
 all in a tale, observe, when Jules shall burst out on us in a fury by and by : I am spokesman—the verses that are to undeceive Jules bear my name of Lutwyche—but each professes himself alike insulted by this strutting stone-squarer, who 325
 came alone from Paris to Munich, and thence with a crowd of us to Venice and Possagno here, but proceeds in a day or two alone again—oh, alone indubitably !—to Rome and Florence. He, forsooth, take up his portion with these dissolute, 330
 brutalized, heartless bunglers !—so he was heard

to call us all: now, is Schramm brutalized, I should like to know? Am I heartless?

Gottlieb. Why, somewhat heartless; for, suppose Jules a coxcomb as much as you choose, still, for this mere coxcombry, you will have brushed off—what do folks style it?—the bloom of his life. Is it too late to alter? These love-letters now, you call his—I can't laugh at them. 335

4th Student. Because you never read the sham letters of our inditing which drew forth these. 340

Gottlieb. His discovery of the truth will be frightful.

4th Student. That 's the joke. But you should have joined us at the beginning: there 's no doubt he loves the girl—loves a model he might hire by the hour! 345

Gottlieb. See here! "He has been accustomed," he writes, "to have Canova's women about him, "in stone, and the world's women beside him, "in flesh; these being as much below, as those "above, his soul's aspiration: but now he is to "have the reality." There you laugh again! I say, you wipe off the very dew of his youth. 350

1st Student. Schramm! (Take the pipe out of his mouth, somebody!) Will Jules lose the bloom of his youth? 355

Schramm. Nothing worth keeping is ever lost in this world: look at a blossom—it drops presently, having done its service and lasted its time; but fruits succeed, and where would be the blossom's place could it continue? As well affirm that your eye is no longer in your body, because its earliest favourite, whatever it may have first loved to look on, is dead and done with—as that any affection is lost to the soul when its first object, whatever happened first to satisfy it, is 365

superseded in due course. Keep but ever looking, whether with the body's eye or the mind's, and you will soon find something to look on! Has a man done wondering at women?—there follow men, dead and alive, to wonder at. Has he done wondering at men?—there 's God to wonder at: and the faculty of wonder may be, at the same time, old and tired enough with respect to its first object, and yet young and fresh sufficiently, so far as concerns its novel one. Thus . . .

1st Student. Put Schramm's pipe into his mouth again! There, you see! Well, this Jules . . . a wretched fribble—oh, I watched his disportings at Possagno, the other day! Canova's gallery—you know: there he marches first resolvedly past great works by the dozen without vouchsafing an eye: all at once he stops full at the *Psiche-fanciulla*—cannot pass that old acquaintance without a nod of encouragement—"In your new place, beauty? Then behave yourself as well here as at Munich—I see you!" Next he posts himself deliberately before the unfinished *Pietà* for half an hour without moving, till up he starts of a sudden, and thrusts his very nose into—I say, into—the group; by which gesture you are informed that precisely the sole point he had not fully mastered in Canova's practice was a certain method of using the drill in the articulation of the knee-joint—and that, likewise, has he mastered at length! Good-bye, therefore, to poor Canova—whose gallery no longer needs detain his successor Jules, the predestinated novel thinker in marble!

5th Student. Tell him about the women: go on to the women!

1st Student. Why, on that matter he could never be supercilious enough. How should we

be other (he said) than the poor devils you see, with those debasing habits we cherish? He was not to wallow in that mire, at least: he would wait, and love only at the proper time, and meanwhile put up with the *Psiche-fanciulla*. Now, I happened to hear of a young Greek—real Greek girl at Malamocco; a true Islander, do you see, with Alciphron's "hair like sea-moss"—Schramm knows!—white and quiet as an apparition, and fourteen years old at farthest,—a daughter of Natalia, so she swears—that hag Natalia, who helps us to models at three *lire* an hour. We selected this girl for the heroine of our jest. So first, Jules received a scented letter—somebody had seen his Tydeus at the Academy, and my picture was nothing to it: a profound admirer bade him persevere—would make herself known to him ere long. (Paolina, my little friend of the *Fenice*, transcribes divinely.) And in due time, the mysterious correspondent gave certain hints of her peculiar charms—the pale cheeks, the black hair—whatever, in short, had struck us in our Malamocco model: we retained her name, too—Phene, which is, by interpretation, sea-eagle. Now, think of Jules finding himself distinguished from the herd of us by such a creature! In his very first answer he proposed marrying his mistress: and fancy us over these letters, two, three times a day, to receive and despatch! I concocted the main of it: relations were in the way—secrecy must be observed—in fine, would he wed her on trust, and only speak to her when they were indissolubly united? St—st—Here they come!

6th Student. Both of them! Heaven's love, speak softly, speak within yourselves!

5th Student. Look at the bridegroom! Half 440
his hair in storm and half in calm,—patted down
over the left temple,—like a frothy cup one blows
on to cool it: and the same old blouse that he
murders the marble in.

2nd Student. Not a rich vest like yours, Hanni- 445
bal Scratchy!—rich, that your face may the better
set it off.

6th Student. And the bride! Yes, sure enough,
our Phene! Should you have known her in her
clothes? How magnificently pale! 450

Gottlieb. She does not also take it for earnest,
I hope?

1st Student. Oh, Natalia's concern, that is!
We settle with Natalia.

6th Student. She does not speak—has evidently 455
let out no word. The only thing is, will she
equally remember the rest of her lesson, and re-
peat correctly all those verses which are to break
the secret to Jules?

Gottlieb. How he gazes on her! Pity—pity! 460

1st Student. They go in: now, silence! You
three,—not nearer the window, mind, than that
pomegranate: just where the little girl, who a
few minutes ago passed us singing, is seated!

PART II

NOON

SCENE.—*Over Orcana. The house of JULES, who crosses its threshold with PHENE : she is silent, on which JULES begins—*

Do not die, Phene ! I am yours now, you
Are mine now ; let fate reach me how she likes,
If you 'll not die : so, never die ! Sit here—
My work-room's single seat. I over-lean
This length of hair and lustrous front ; they turn 5
Like an entire flower upward : eyes, lips, last
Your chin—no, last your throat turns : 't is their
scent

Pulls down my face upon you. Nay, look ever
This one way till I change, grow you—I could
Change into you, beloved !

You by me, 10
And I by you ; this is your hand in mine,
And side by side we sit : all 's true. Thank God !
I have spoken : speak you !

O my life to come !
My Tydeus must be carved that 's there in clay ;
Yet how be carved, with you about the room ? 15
Where must I place you ? When I think that once
This room-full of rough block-work seemed my
heaven

Without you ! Shall I ever work again,
Get fairly into my old ways again,

Bid each conception stand while, trait by trait, 20
 My hand transfers its lineaments to stone?
 Will my mere fancies live near you, their truth—
 The live truth, passing and repassing me,
 Sitting beside me?

Now speak !

Only first,
 See, all your letters ! Was 't not well contrived ? 25
 Their hiding-place is Psyche's robe ; she keeps
 Your letters next her skin : which drops out
 foremost ?

Ah,—this that swam down like a first moonbeam
 Into my world !

Again those eyes complete
 Their melancholy survey, sweet and slow, 30
 Of all my room holds ; to return and rest
 On me, with pity, yet some wonder too :
 As if God bade some spirit plague a world,
 And this were the one moment of surprise
 And sorrow while she took her station, pausing 35
 O'er what she sees, finds good, and must destroy !
 What gaze you at ? Those ? Books, I told you of ;
 Let your first word to me rejoice them, too :
 This minion, a Coluthus, writ in red
 Bistre and azure by Bessarion's scribe— 40
 Read this line . . . no, shame—Homer's be the
 Greek

First breathed me from the lips of my Greek girl !
 This Odyssey in coarse black vivid type
 With faded yellow blossoms 'twixt page and page,
 To mark great places with due gratitude ; 45
"He said, and on Antinous directed
"A bitter shaft" . . . a flower blots out the rest !
 Again upon your search ? My statues, then !
 —Ah, do not mind that—better that will look
 When cast in bronze—an Almaign Kaiser, that, 50

Swart-green and gold, with truncheon based
on hip.

This, rather, turn to! What, unrecognized?

I thought you would have seen that here you sit

As I imagined you,—Hippolyta,

Naked upon her bright Numidian horse. 55

Recall you this then? "Carve in bold relief"—

So you commanded—"carve, against I come,

"A Greek, in Athens, as our fashion was,

"Feasting, bay-filleted and thunder-free,

"Who rises 'neath the lifted myrtle-branch. 60

" 'Praise those who slew Hipparchus!' cry the
guests,

" 'While o'er thy head the singer's myrtle waves

" 'As erst above our champion : stand up, all!'"

See, I have laboured to express your thought.

Quite round, a cluster of mere hands and arms, 65

(Thrust in all senses, all ways, from all sides,

Only consenting at the branch's end

They strain toward) serves for frame to a sole face,

The Praiser's, in the centre : who with eyes

Sightless, so bend they back to light inside 70

His brain where visionary forms throng up,

Sings, minding not that palpitating arch

Of hands and arms, nor the quick drip of wine

From the drenched leaves o'erhead, nor crowns
cast off,

Violet and parsley crowns to trample on— 75

Sings, pausing as the patron-ghosts approve,

Devoutly their unconquerable hymn.

But you must say a "well" to that—say "well!"

Because you gaze—am I fantastic, sweet?

Gaze like my very life's-stuff, marble—marbly 80

Even to the silence! Why, before I found

The real flesh Phene, I inured myself

To see, throughout all nature, varied stuff

For better nature's birth by means of art :
With me, each substance tended to one form 85
Of beauty—to the human archetype.
On every side occurred suggestive germs
Of that—the tree, the flower—or take the fruit,—
Some rosy shape, continuing the peach,
Curved beewise o'er its bough ; as rosy limbs, 90
Depending, nestled in the leaves ; and just
From a cleft rose-peach the whole Dryad sprang.
But of the stuffs one can be master of,
How I divined their capabilities !
From the soft-rinded smoothening facile chalk 95
That yields your outline to the air's embrace,
Half-softened by a halo's pearly gloom ;
Down to the crisp imperious steel, so sure
To cut its one confided thought clean out
Of all the world. But marble !—'neath my tools 100
More pliable than jelly—as it were
Some clear primordial creature dug from depths
In the earth's heart, where itself breeds itself,
And whence all baser substance may be worked ;
Refine it off to air, you may,—condense it 105
Down to the diamond ;—is not metal there,
When o'er the sudden speck my chisel trips ?
—Not flesh, as flake off flake I scale, approach,
Lay bare those bluish veins of blood asleep ?
Lurks flame in no strange windings where, 110
surprised
By the swift implement sent home at once,
Flushes and glowings radiate and hover
About its track ?
Phene ? what—why is this ?
That whitening cheek, those still dilating eyes !
Ah, you will die—I knew that you would die ! 115

PHENE *begins, on his having long remained silent*

Now the end 's coming ; to be sure, it must
Have ended sometime ! Tush, why need I speak
Their foolish speech ? I cannot bring to mind
One half of it, beside ; and do not care
For old Natalia now, nor any of them.

120

Oh, you—what are you ?—if I do not try
To say the words Natalia made me learn,
To please your friends,—it is to keep myself
Where your voice lifted me, by letting that
Proceed : but can it ? Even you, perhaps,
Cannot take up, now you have once let fall,
The music's life, and me along with that—
No, or you would ! We 'll stay, then, as we are :
Above the world.

125

You creature with the eyes !

If I could look for ever up to them,
As now you let me,—I believe, all sin,
All memory of wrong done, suffering borne,
Would drop down, low and lower, to the earth
Whence all that 's low comes, and there touch
and stay

130

—Never to overtake the rest of me,
All that, unspotted, reaches up to you,
Drawn by those eyes ! What rises is myself,
Not me the shame and suffering ; but they sink,
Are left, I rise above them. Keep me so,
Above the world !

135

But you sink, for your eyes
Are altering — altered ! Stay — “ I love you,
love ” . . .

140

I could prevent it if I understood :
More of your words to me : was 't in the tone
Or the words, your power ?

Or stay—I will repeat

Their speech, if that contents you! Only change 145
No more, and I shall find it presently
Far back here, in the brain yourself filled up.
Natalia threatened me that harm should follow
Unless I spoke their lesson to the end,
But harm to me, I thought she meant, not you. 150
Your friends,—Natalia said they were your friends
And meant you well,—because, I doubted it,
Observing (what was very strange to see)
On every face, so different in all else,
The same smile girls like me are used to bear, 155
But never men, men cannot stoop so low;
Yet your friends, speaking of you, used that
smile,
That hateful smirk of boundless self-conceit
Which seems to take possession of the world
And make of God a tame confederate, 160
Purveyor to their appetites . . . you know!
But still Natalia said they were your friends,
And they assented though they smiled the more,
And all came round me,—that thin Englishman
With light lank hair seemed leader of the rest; 165
He held a paper—"What we want," said he,
Ending some explanation to his friends—
"Is something slow, involved and mystical,
"To hold Jules long in doubt, yet take his taste
"And lure him on until, at innermost 170
"Where he seeks sweetness' soul, he may find—
this!
"—As in the apple's core, the noisome fly:
"For insects on the rind are seen at once,
"And brushed aside as soon, but this is found
"Only when on the lips or loathing tongue." 175
And so he read what I have got by heart:
I'll speak it,—“Do not die, love! I am yours.”
No—is not that, or like that, part of words

Yourself began by speaking? Strange to lose
 What cost such pains to learn! Is this more right? 180

*I am a painter who cannot paint ;
 In my life, a devil rather than saint ;
 In my brain, as poor a creature too :
 No end to all I cannot do !
 Yet do one thing at least I can —* 185
Love a man or hate a man
Supremely : thus my lore began.
Through the Valley of Love I went,
In the loveliest spot to abide,
And just on the verge where I pitched my tent, 190
I found Hate dwelling beside.
(Let the Bridegroom ask what the painter meant,
Of his Bride, of the peerless Bride !)
And further, I traversed Hate's grove,
In the hatefullest nook to dwell ; 195
But lo, where I flung myself prone, couched Love
Where the shadow threefold fell.
(The meaning—those black bride's-eyes above,
Not a painter's lip should tell !)

“And here,” said he, “Jules probably will ask, 200
 “‘You have black eyes, Love,—you are, sure
 enough,
 “‘My peerless bride,—then do you tell indeed
 “‘What needs some explanation! What means
 this?’”

—And I am to go on, without a word—

So, I grew wise in Love and Hate, 205
From simple that I was of late.
Once, when I loved, I would enlase
Breast, eyelids, hands, feet, form and face
Of her I loved, in one embrace—
As if by mere love I could love immensely ! 210
Once, when I hated, I would plunge
My sword, and wipe with the first lunge
My foe's whole life out like a sponge—
As if by mere hate I could hate intensely !
But now I am wiser, know better the fashion 215
How passion seeks aid from its opposite passion :

*And if I see cause to love more, hate more
 Than ever man loved, ever hated before—
 And seek in the Valley of Love,
 The nest, or the nook in Hate's Grove,* 220
*Where my soul may surely reach
 The essence, nought less, of each,
 The Hate of all Hates, the Love
 Of all Loves, in the Valley or Grove,—
 I find them the very warders* 225
*Each of the other's borders.
 When I love most, Love is disguised
 In Hate ; and when Hate is surprised
 In Love, then I hate most : ask
 How Love smiles through Hate's iron casque,* 230
*Hate grins through Love's rose-braided mask,—
 And how, having hated thee,
 I sought long and painfully
 To reach thy heart, nor prick
 The skin but pierce to the quick—* 235
*Ask this, my Jules, and be answered straight
 By thy bride—how the painter Lutwyche can hate !*

JULES *interposes*

Lutwyche ! Who else ? But all of them, no doubt,

Hated me : they at Venice—presently
 Their turn, however ! You I shall not meet : 240
 If I dreamed, saying this would wake me.

Keep

What 's here, the gold—we cannot meet again,
 Consider ! and the money was but meant
 For two years' travel, which is over now,
 All chance or hope or care or need of it. 245
 This—and what comes from selling these, my
 casts

And books and medals, except . . . let them go
 Together, so the produce keeps you safe
 Out of Natalia's clutches ! If by chance
 (For all 's chance here) I should survive the gang 250

At Venice, root out all fifteen of them,
We might meet somewhere, since the world is wide.
[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA, singing—*

*Give her but a least excuse to love me!
When—where—
How—can this arm establish her above me, 255
If fortune fixed her as my lady there,
There already, to eternally reprove me?
("Hist!"—said Kate the Queen;
But "Oh!"—cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
" 'Tis only a page that carols unseen, 260
"Crumbling your hounds their messes!")*

*Is she wronged?—To the rescue of her honour,
My heart!
Is she poor?—What costs it to be styled a donor?
Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part. 265
But that fortune should have thrust all this upon her!
("Nay, list!"—bade Kate the Queen;
And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
" 'Tis only a page that carols unseen,
"Fitting your hawks their jesses!") 270*

[PIPPA *passes.*

JULES *resumes*

What name was that the little girl sang forth?
Kate? The Cornaro, doubtless, who renounced
The crown of Cyprus to be lady here
At Asolo, where still her memory stays,
And peasants sing how once a certain page 275
Pined for the grace of her so far above
His power of doing good to, "Kate the Queen—
"She never could be wronged, be poor," he sighed,
"Need him to help her!"

Yes, a bitter thing
To see our lady above all need of us; 280
Yet so we look ere we will love; not I,
But the world looks so. If whoever loves

Must be, in some sort, god or worshipper,
 The blessing or the blest one, queen or page,
 Why should we always choose the page's part? 285
 Here is a woman with utter need of me,—
 I find myself queen here, it seems!

How strange!

Look at the woman here with the new soul,
 Like my own Psyche,—fresh upon her lips
 Alit, the visionary butterfly, 290
 Waiting my word to enter and make bright,
 Or flutter off and leave all blank as first.
 This body had no soul before, but slept
 Or stirred, was beauteous or ungainly, free
 From taint or foul with stain, as outward things 295
 Fastened their image on its passiveness :
 Now, it will wake, feel, live—or die again!
 Shall to produce form out of unshaped stuff
 Be Art—and further, to evoke a soul
 From form be nothing? This new soul is mine! 300

Now, to kill Lutwyche, what would that do?—save
 A wretched dauber, men will hoot to death
 Without me, from their hooting. Oh, to hear
 God's voice plain as I heard it first, before
 They broke in with their laughter! I heard them 305
 Henceforth, not God.

To Ancona—Greece—some isle!

I wanted silence only; there is clay
 Everywhere. One may do whate'er one likes
 In Art: the only thing is, to make sure
 That one does like it—which takes pains to know. 310

Scatter all this, my Phene—this mad dream!
 Who, what is Lutwyche, what Natalia's friends,
 What the whole world except our love—my
 own,

Own Phene? But I told you, did I not,

Ere night we travel for your land—some isle 315
 With the sea's silence on it? Stand aside—
 I do but break these paltry models up
 To begin Art afresh. Meet Lutwyche, I—
 And save him from my statue meeting him?
 Some unsuspected isle in the far seas! 320
 Like a god going through his world, there stands
 One mountain for a moment in the dusk,
 Whole brotherhoods of cedars on its brow:
 And you are ever by me while I gaze
 —Are in my arms as now—as now—as now! 325
 Some unsuspected isle in the far seas!
 Some unsuspected isle in far-off seas!

*Talk by the way, while PIPPA is passing from Orcana to the Turret.
 Two or three of the Austrian Police loitering with BLUPHOCKS,
 an English vagabond, just in view of the Turret*

*Bluphocks.*¹ So, that is your Pippa, the little
 girl who passed us singing? Well, your Bishop's
 Intendant's money shall be honestly earned:— 330
 now, don't make me that sour face because I
 bring the Bishop's name into the business; we
 know he can have nothing to do with such horrors:
 we know that he is a saint and all that a bishop
 should be, who is a great man beside. *Oh were* 335
but every worm a maggot, Every fly a grig, Every
bough a Christmas faggot, Every tune a jig! In
 fact, I have abjured all religions; but the last
 I inclined to, was the Armenian: for I have
 travelled, do you see, and at Koenigsberg, 340
 Prussia Improper (so styled because there 's a
 sort of bleak hungry sun there), you might re-

¹ "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

mark over a venerable house-porch, a certain Chaldee inscription; and brief as it is, a mere glance at it used absolutely to change the mood 345 of every bearded passenger. In they turned, one and all; the young and lightsome, with no irreverent pause, the aged and decrepit, with a sensible alacrity: 't was the Grand Rabbi's abode, in short. Struck with curiosity, I lost no time 350 in learning Syriac—(these are vowels, you dogs,—follow my stick's end in the mud—*Celarent, Darii, Ferio*!) and one morning presented myself, spelling-book in hand, a, b, c,—I picked it out letter by letter, and what was the purport of this miracu- 355 lous posy? Some cherished legend of the past, you 'll say—“*How Moses hocus-pocussed Egypt's land with fly and locust*,”—or, “*How to Jonah sounded harshish, Get thee up and go to Tarshish*,”—or, “*How the angel meeting Balaam, Straight his ass returned a salaam*.” In no wise! “*Shackabrack*—*Boach*—somebody or other—*Isaach, Re-cei-ver, Pur-cha-ser and Ex-chan-ger of—Stolen Goods*!” So, talk to me of the religion of a bishop! I have renounced all bishops save Bishop Beveridge 365 —mean to live so—and die—*As some Greek dog-sage, dead and merry, Hellward bound in Charon's wherry, With food for both worlds, under and upper, Lupine-seed and Hecate's supper, And never an obolus . . .* (Though thanks to you, or this Intendant through you, or this Bishop through his Intendant—I possess a burning pocketful of *zwanzigers*) . . . *To pay the Stygian Ferry!* 370

1st Policeman. There is a girl, then; go and deserve them the moment you have pointed out 375 to us Signor Luigi and his mother. [*To the rest.*] I have been noticing a house yonder, this long while: not a shutter unclosed since morning!

2nd Policeman. Old Luca Gaddi's, that owns the silk-mills here : he dozes by the hour, wakes up, sighs deeply, says he should like to be Prince Metternich, and then dozes again, after having bidden young Sebald, the foreigner, set his wife to playing draughts. Never molest such a household, they mean well. 380 385

Bluphocks. Only, cannot you tell me something of this little Pippa, I must have to do with? One could make something of that name. Pippa—that is, short for Felippa—rhyming to *Panurge consults Hertrippa—Believest thou, King Agrippa?* 390
Something might be done with that name.

2nd Policeman. Put into rhyme that your head and a ripe musk-melon would not be dear at half a *zwanziger!* Leave this fooling, and look out; the afternoon 's over or nearly so. 395

3rd Policeman. Where in this passport of Signor Luigi does our Principal instruct you to watch him so narrowly? There? What 's there beside a simple signature? (That English fool 's busy watching.) 400

2nd Policeman. Flourish all round—"Put all possible obstacles in his way"; oblong dot at the end—"Detain him till further advices reach you"; scratch at bottom—"Send him back on pretence of some informality in the above"; ink-spirt on right-hand side (which is the case here) —"Arrest him at once." Why and wherefore, I don't concern myself, but my instructions amount to this : if Signor Luigi leaves home to-night for Vienna—well and good, the passport deposed with us for our *visa* is really for his own use, they have misinformed the Office, and he means well ; but let him stay over to-night—there has been the pretence we suspect, the accounts of his corre- 410

sponding and holding intelligence with the 415
Carbonari are correct, we arrest him at once,
to-morrow comes Venice, and presently Spielberg.
Bluphocks makes the signal, sure enough ! That
is he, entering the turret with his mother, no
doubt. 420

PART III

EVENING

SCENE.—*Inside the Turret on the Hill above Asolo.*
LUIGI and his Mother entering

Mother. If there blew wind, you 'd hear a long
sigh, easing

The utmost heaviness of music's heart.

Luigi. Here in the archway?

Mother. Oh no, no—in farther,
Where the echo is made, on the ridge.

Luigi. Here surely, then.

How plain the tap of my heel as I leaped up ! 5

Hark—"Lucius Junius!" The very ghost of a
voice

Whose body is caught and kept by . . . what are
those?

Mere withered wallflowers, waving overhead?

They seem an elvish group with thin bleached hair
That lean out of their topmost fortress—look 10

And listen, mountain men, to what we say,

Hand under chin of each grave earthy face.

Up and show faces all of you!—"All of you!"

That 's the king dwarf with the scarlet comb; old
Franz,

Come down and meet your fate? Hark—"Meet
your fate!" 15

Mother. Let him not meet it, my Luigi—do not
Go to his City! Putting crime aside,
Half of these ills of Italy are feigned:

Your Pellicos and writers for effect,
Write for effect.

Luigi. Hush! Say A. writes, and B. 20

Mother. These A.s and B.s write for effect, I say.
Then, evil is in its nature loud, while good
Is silent; you hear each petty injury,
None of his virtues; he is old beside,
Quiet and kind, and densely stupid. Why 25
Do A. and B. not kill him themselves?

Luigi. They teach
Others to kill him—me—and, if I fail,
Others to succeed; now, if A. tried and failed,
I could not teach that: mine's the lesser task.
Mother, they visit night by night . . .

Mother. —You, Luigi? 30
Ah, will you let me tell you what you are?

Luigi. Why not? Oh, the one thing you fear
to hint,
You may assure yourself I say and say
Ever to myself! At times—nay, even as now
We sit—I think my mind is touched, suspect 35
All is not sound: but is not knowing that,
What constitutes one sane or otherwise?
I know I am thus—so, all is right again.
I laugh at myself as through the town I walk,
And see men merry as if no Italy 40
Were suffering; then I ponder—"I am rich,
"Young, healthy; why should this fact trouble me,
"More than it troubles these?" But it does trouble.
No, trouble's a bad word: for as I walk
There's springing and melody and giddiness, 45
And old quaint turns and passages of my youth,
Dreams long forgotten, little in themselves,
Return to me—whatever may amuse me:
And earth seems in a truce with me, and heaven
Accords with me, all things suspend their strife, 50

The very cicala laughs "There goes he, and there!
 "Feast him, the time is short; he is on his way
 "For the world's sake: feast him this once, our
 friend!"

And in return for all this, I can trip
 Cheerfully up the scaffold-steps. I go 55
 This evening, mother!

Mother. But mistrust yourself—
 Mistrust the judgment you pronounce on him!

Luigi. Oh, there I feel—am sure that I am right!

Mother. Mistrust your judgment then, of the
 mere means

To this wild enterprise. Say, you are right,— 60
 How should one in your state e'er bring to pass
 What would require a cool head, a cold heart,
 And a calm hand? You never will escape.

Luigi. Escape? To even wish that, would spoil
 all.

The dying is best part of it. Too much 65
 Have I enjoyed these fifteen years of mine,
 To leave myself excuse for longer life:

Was not life pressed down, running o'er with joy,
 That I might finish with it ere my fellows
 Who, sparelier feasted, make a longer stay? 70

I was put at the board-head, helped to all
 At first; I rise up happy and content.

God must be glad one loves his world so much.

I can give news of earth to all the dead
 Who ask me:—last year's sunsets, and great stars 75

Which had a right to come first and see ebb
 The crimson wave that drifts the sun away—
 Those crescent moons with notched and burning
 rims

That strengthened into sharp fire, and there stood,
 Impatient of the azure—and that day 80
 In March, a double rainbow stopped the storm—

May's warm slow yellow moonlit summer nights—
Gone are they, but I have them in my soul!

Mother. (He will not go!)

Luigi. You smile at me? 'T is true,—
Voluptuousness, grotesqueness, ghastliness, 85
Environ my devotedness as quaintly
As round about some antique altar wreath
The rose festoons, goats' horns, and oxen's skulls.

Mother. See now : you reach the city, you must
cross

His threshold—how?

Luigi. Oh, that 's if we conspired ! 90
Then would come pains in plenty, as you guess—
But guess not how the qualities most fit
For such an office, qualities I have,
Would little stead me, otherwise employed,
Yet prove of rarest merit only here. 95

Every one knows for what his excellence
Will serve, but no one ever will consider
For what his worst defect might serve : and yet
Have you not seen me range our coppice yonder
In search of a distorted ash?—I find 100
The wry spoilt branch a natural perfect bow.
Fancy the thrice-sage, thrice-precautioned man
Arriving at the palace on my errand !

No, no ! I have a handsome dress packed up—
White satin here, to set off my black hair ; 105
In I shall march—for you may watch your life out
Behind thick walls, make friends there to betray
you ;

More than one man spoils everything. March
straight—

Only, no clumsy knife to fumble for.
Take the great gate, and walk (not saunter) on 110
Thro' guards and guards—I have rehearsed it all
Inside the turret here a hundred times.

Don't ask the way of whom you meet, observe!
 But where they cluster thickest is the door
 Of doors; they'll let you pass—they'll never blab 115
 Each to the other, he knows not the favourite,
 Whence he is bound and what's his business now.
 Walk in—straight up to him; you have no knife:
 Be prompt, how should he scream? Then, out
 with you!

Italy, Italy, my Italy! 120
 You're free, you're free! Oh mother, I could
 dream

They got about me—Andrea from his exile,
 Pier from his dungeon, Gualtier from his grave!
Mother. Well, you shall go. Yet seems this
 patriotism

The easiest virtue for a selfish man 125
 To acquire: he loves himself—and next, the world—
 If he must love beyond,—but nought between:
 As a short-sighted man sees nought midway
 His body and the sun above. But you
 Are my adored Luigi, ever obedient 130
 To my least wish, and running o'er with love:
 I could not call you cruel or unkind.

Once more, your ground for killing him!—then go!
Luigi. Now do you try me, or make sport of me?
 How first the Austrians got these provinces . . . 135
 (If that is all, I'll satisfy you soon)
 —Never by conquest but by cunning, for
 That treaty whereby . . .

Mother. Well?

Luigi. (Sure, he's arrived,
 The tell-tale cuckoo: spring's his confidant,
 And he lets out her April purposes!) 140
 Or . . . better go at once to modern time,
 He has . . . they have . . . in fact, I understand
 But can't restate the matter; that's my boast:

Others could reason it out to you, and prove
Things they have made me feel.

Mother. Why go to-night? 145

Morn 's for adventure. Jupiter is now
A morning-star. I cannot hear you, Luigi!

Luigi. "I am the bright and morning-star,"
saith God—

And, "to such an one I give the morning-star."
The gift of the morning-star! Have I God's gift 150
Of the morning-star?

Mother. Chiara will love to see
That Jupiter an evening-star next June.

Luigi. True, mother. Well for those who live
through June!

Great noontides, thunder-storms, all glaring pomps
That triumph at the heels of June the god 155
Leading his revel through our leafy world.
Yes, Chiara will be here.

Mother. In June: remember,
Yourself appointed that month for her coming.

Luigi. Was that low noise the echo?

Mother. The night-wind.
She must be grown—with her blue eyes upturned 160
As if life were one long and sweet surprise:
In June she comes.

Luigi. We were to see together
The Titian at Treviso. There, again!

[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA,
singing—*

*A king lived long ago,
In the morning of the world, 165
When earth was nigher heaven than now:
And the king's locks curled,
Disparting o'er a forehead full
As the milk-white space 'twixt horn and horn
Of some sacrificial bull— 170
Only calm as a babe new-born:*

*For he was got to a sleepy mood,
So safe from all decrepitude,
Age with its bane, so sure gone by,
(The gods so loved him while he dreamed) 175
That, having lived thus long, there seemed
No need the king should ever die.*

Luigi. No need that sort of king should ever die !

*Among the rocks his city was :
Before his palace, in the sun, 180
He sat to see his people pass,
And judge them every one
From its threshold of smooth stone.
They haled him many a valley-thief
Caught in the sheep-pens, robber-chief 185
Swarthy and shameless, beggar-cheat,
Spy-prowler, or rough pirate found
On the sea-sand left aground ;
And sometimes clung about his feet,
With bleeding lip and burning cheek, 190
A woman, bitterest wrong to speak
Of one with sullen thickset brows :
And sometimes from the prison-house
The angry priests a pale wretch brought,
Who through some chink had pushed and pressed 195
On knees and elbows, belly and breast,
Worm-like into the temple,—caught
He was by the very god,
Who ever in the darkness strode
Backward and forward, keeping watch 200
O'er his brazen bowls, such rogues to catch !
These, all and every one,
The king judged, sitting in the sun.*

Luigi. That kings should still judges sitting in the sun !

*His councillors, on left and right, 205
Looked anxious up,—but no surprise
Disturbed the king's old smiling eyes
Where the very blue had turned to white.
'T is said, a Python scared one day
The breathless city, till he came, 210
With forked tongue and eyes on flame,
Where the old king sat to judge alway ;*

*But when he saw the sweepy hair
 Girt with a crown of berries rare
 Which the god will hardly give to wear* 215
*To the maiden who singeth, dancing bare
 In the altar-smoke by the pine-torch lights,
 At his wondrous forest rites,—
 Seeing this, he did not dare
 Approach that threshold in the sun,* 220
*Assault the old king smiling there.
 Such grace had kings when the world begun!*
 [PIPPA passes.

Luigi. And such grace have they, now that
 the world ends!
 The Python at the city, on the throne,
 And brave men, God would crown for slaying him, 225
 Lurk in bye-corners lest they fall his prey.
 Are crowns yet to be won in this late time,
 Which weakness makes me hesitate to reach?
 'Tis God's voice calls: how could I stay? Farewell!

*Talk by the way, while PIPPA is passing from the Turret to the
 Bishop's Brother's House, close to the Duomo S. Maria.
 Poor Girls sitting on the steps*

1st Girl. There goes a swallow to Venice—the
 stout seafarer! 230
 Seeing those birds fly, makes one wish for wings.
 Let us all wish; you wish first!

2nd Girl. I? This sunset
 To finish.

3rd Girl. That old—somebody I know,
 Greyer and older than my grandfather,
 To give me the same treat he gave last week— 235
 Feeding me on his knee with fig-peckers,
 Lampreys and red Breganze-wine, and mumbling
 The while some folly about how well I fare,
 Let sit and eat my supper quietly:

Since had he not himself been late this morning 240
 Detained at—never mind where,—had he not . . .

“Eh, baggage, had I not!”—

2nd Girl. How she can lie!

3rd Girl. Look there—by the nails!

2nd Girl. What makes your fingers red?

3rd Girl. Dipping them into wine to write bad
 words with

On the bright table : how he laughed!

1st Girl. My turn. 245

Spring's come and summer's coming. I would
 wear

A long loose gown, down to the feet and hands,
 With plaits here, close about the throat, all day;
 And all night lie, the cool long nights, in bed;
 And have new milk to drink, apples to eat, 250
 Deuzans and junetings, leather-coats . . . ah, I
 should say,

This is away in the fields—miles!

3rd Girl. Say at once

You'd be at home : she'd always be at home!

Now comes the story of the farm among
 The cherry orchards, and how April snowed 255
 White blossoms on her as she ran. Why, fool,
 They've rubbed the chalk-mark out, how tall you
 were,

Twisted your starling's neck, broken his cage,
 Made a dung-hill of your garden!

1st Girl. They, destroy

My garden since I left them? well—perhaps! 260

I would have done so : so I hope they have!

A fig-tree curled out of our cottage wall;

They called it mine, I have forgotten why,

It must have been there long ere I was born :

Cric—cric—I think I hear the wasps o'erhead 265

Pricking the papers strung to flutter there

And keep off birds in fruit-time—coarse long papers,
And the wasps eat them, prick them through and
through.

3rd Girl. How her mouth twitches! Where was
I?—before

She broke in with her wishes and long gowns 270

And wasps—would I be such a fool!—Oh, here!

This is my way: I answer every one

Who asks me why I make so much of him—

(If you say, “you love him”—straight “he ’ll not
be gulled!”)

“He that seduced me when I was a girl 275

“Thus high—had eyes like yours, or hair like
yours,

“Brown, red, white,”—as the case may be: that
pleases!

See how that beetle burnishes in the path!

There sparkles he along the dust: and, there—

Your journey to that maize-tuft spoiled at least! 280

1st Girl. When I was young, they said if you
killed one

Of those sunshiny beetles, that his friend

Up there, would shine no more that day nor next.

2nd Girl. When you were young? Nor are you
young, that’s true.

How your plump arms, that were, have dropped
away! 285

Why, I can span them. Cecco beats you still?

No matter, so you keep your curious hair.

I wish they’d find a way to dye our hair

Your colour—any lighter tint, indeed,

Than black: the men say they are sick of black, 290

Black eyes, black hair!

4th Girl. Sick of yours, like enough.

Do you pretend you ever tasted lampreys

And ortolans? Giovita, of the palace,

Engaged (but there 's no trusting him) to slice me
Polenta with a knife that had cut up 295
An ortolan.

2nd Girl. Why, there! Is not that Pippa
We are to talk to, under the window,—quick,—
Where the lights are?

1st Girl. That she? No, or she would sing,
For the Intendant said . . .

3rd Girl. Oh, you sing first!
Then, if she listens and comes close . . . I 'll tell
you,— 300

Sing that song the young English noble made,
Who took you for the purest of the pure,
And meant to leave the world for you—what fun!

2nd Girl [*sings*].

*You 'll love me yet!—and I can tarry
Your love's protracted growing:
June reared that bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April's sowing.* 305

*I plant a heartfelt now: some seed
At least is sure to strike,
And yield—what you 'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, may be, like.* 310

*You 'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look?—that pays a thousand pains.
What 's death? You 'll love me yet!* 315

3rd Girl [*to PIPPA who approaches*]. Oh, you
may come closer—we shall not eat you! Why,
you seem the very person that the great rich hand-
some Englishman has fallen so violently in love
with. I 'll tell you all about it. 320

PART IV

NIGHT

SCENE.—*Inside the Palace by the Duomo.* MONSIGNOR, *dismissing his Attendants*

Monsignor. Thanks, friends, many thanks! I chiefly desire life now, that I may recompense every one of you. Most I know something of already. What, a repast prepared? *Benedicto benedicatur* . . . ugh, ugh! Where was I? Oh, as you were 5
remarking, Ugo, the weather is mild, very unlike winter-weather: but I am a Sicilian, you know, and shiver in your Julys here. To be sure, when 't was full summer at Messina, as we priests used to cross in procession the great square on Assump- 10
tion Day, you might see our thickest yellow tapers twist suddenly in two, each like a falling star, or sink down on themselves in a gore of wax. But go, my friends, but go! [*To the Intendant.*] Not you, Ugo! [*The others leave the apartment.*] I 15
have long wanted to converse with you, Ugo.

Intendant. Uguccio—

Monsignor. . . . 'guccio Stefani, man! of Ascoli, Fermo and Fossombruno;—what I do need instructing about, are these accounts of your ad- 20
ministration of my poor brother's affairs. Ugh! I shall never get through a third part of your accounts: take some of these dainties before we attempt it, however. Are you bashful to that degree? For me, a crust and water suffice. 25

Intendant. Do you choose this especial night to question me?

Monsignor. This night, Ugo. You have managed my late brother's affairs since the death of our elder brother: fourteen years and a month, all but three days. On the Third of December, I find him . . .

Intendant. If you have so intimate an acquaintance with your brother's affairs, you will be tender of turning so far back: they will hardly bear looking into, so far back.

Monsignor. Ay, ay, ugh, ugh,—nothing but disappointments here below! I remark a considerable payment made to yourself on this Third of December. Talk of disappointments! There was a young fellow here, Jules, a foreign sculptor I did my utmost to advance, that the Church might be a gainer by us both: he was going on hopefully enough, and of a sudden he notifies to me some marvellous change that has happened in his notions of Art. Here's his letter,—“He never had a clearly conceived Ideal within his brain till to-day. Yet since his hand could manage a chisel, he has practised expressing other men's Ideals; and, in the very perfection he has attained to, he foresees an ultimate failure: his unconscious hand will pursue its prescribed course of old years, and will reproduce with a fatal expertness the ancient types, let the novel one appear never so palpably to his spirit. There is but one method of escape: confiding the virgin type to as chaste a hand, he will turn painter instead of sculptor, and paint, not carve, its characteristics,”—strike out, I dare say, a school like Correggio: how think you, Ugo?

Intendant. Is Correggio a painter?

Monsignor. Foolish Jules! and yet, after all, why foolish? He may—probably will—fail egregiously; but if there should arise a new painter, will it not be in some such way, by a poet now, or a musician 65 (spirits who have conceived and perfected an Ideal through some other channel), transferring it to this, and escaping our conventional roads by pure ignorance of them; eh, Ugo? If you have no appetite, talk at least, Ugo! 70

Intendant. Sir, I can submit no longer to this course of yours. First, you select the group of which I formed one,—next you thin it gradually,—always retaining me with your smile,—and so do you proceed till you have fairly got me alone with 75 you between four stone walls. And now then? Let this farce, this chatter end now: what is it you want with me?

Monsignor. Ugo!

Intendant. From the instant you arrived, I felt 80 your smile on me as you questioned me about this and the other article in those papers—why your brother should have given me this villa, that *podere*,—and your nod at the end meant,—what?

Monsignor. Possibly that I wished for no loud 85 talk here. If once you set me coughing, Ugo!—

Intendant. I have your brother's hand and seal to all I possess: now ask me what for! what service I did him—ask me!

Monsignor. I would better not: I should rip up 90 old disgraces, let out my poor brother's weaknesses. By the way, Maffeo of Forli (which, I forgot to observe, is your true name), was the interdict ever taken off you, for robbing that church at Cesena?

Intendant. No, nor needs be: for when I murdered your brother's friend, Pasquale, for him . . . 95

Monsignor. Ah, he employed you in that busi-

ness, did he? Well, I must let you keep, as you say, this villa and that *podere*, for fear the world should find out my relations were of so indifferent a stamp? Maffeo, my family is the oldest in Messina, and century after century have my progenitors gone on polluting themselves with every wickedness under heaven: my own father . . . rest his soul!—I have, I know, a chapel to support that it may rest: my dear two dead brothers were, —what you know tolerably well; I, the youngest, might have rivalled them in vice, if not in wealth: but from my boyhood I came out from among them, and so am not partaker of their plagues. My glory springs from another source; or if from this, by contrast only,—for I, the bishop, am the brother of your employers, Ugo. I hope to repair some of their wrong, however; so far as my brother's ill-gotten treasure reverts to me, I can stop the consequences of his crime: and not one *soldo* shall escape me. Maffeo, the sword we quiet men spurn away, you shrewd knaves pick up and commit murders with; what opportunities the virtuous forego, the villanous seize. Because, to pleasure myself apart from other considerations, my food would be millet-cake, my dress sackcloth, and my couch straw,—am I therefore to let you, the off-scouring of the earth, seduce the poor and ignorant by appropriating a pomp these will be sure to think lessens the abominations so unaccountably and exclusively associated with it? Must I let villas and *poderi* go to you, a murderer and thief, that you may beget by means of them other murderers and thieves? No—if my cough would but allow me to speak!

Intendant. What am I to expect? You are going to punish me?

Monsignor. —Must punish you, Maffeo. I cannot afford to cast away a chance. I have whole 135
centuries of sin to redeem, and only a month or two of life to do it in. How should I dare to say . . .

Intendant. “Forgive us our trespasses”?

Monsignor. My friend, it is because I avow myself a very worm, sinful beyond measure, that I 140
reject a line of conduct you would applaud perhaps. Shall I proceed, as it were, a-pardoning? —I?—who have no symptom of reason to assume that aught less than my strenuousest efforts will keep myself out of mortal sin, much less keep 145
others out. No: I do trespass, but will not double that by allowing you to trespass.

Intendant. And suppose the villas are not your brother’s to give, nor yours to take? Oh, you are hasty enough just now! 150

Monsignor. 1, 2—N° 3!—ay, can you read the substance of a letter, N° 3, I have received from Rome? It is precisely on the ground there mentioned, of the suspicion I have that a certain child of my late elder brother, who would have 155
succeeded to his estates, was murdered in infancy by you, Maffeo, at the instigation of my late younger brother—that the Pontiff enjoins on me not merely the bringing that Maffeo to condign punishment, but the taking all pains, as guardian 160
of the infant’s heritage for the Church, to recover it parcel by parcel, howsoever, whensoever, and wheresoever. While you are now gnawing those fingers, the police are engaged in sealing up your papers, Maffeo, and the mere raising my voice 165
brings my people from the next room to dispose of yourself. But I want you to confess quietly, and save me raising my voice. Why, man, do I not know the old story? The heir between the

succeeding heir, and this heir's ruffianly instrument, and their complot's effect, and the life of fear and bribes and ominous smiling silence? Did you throttle or stab my brother's infant? Come now!

Intendant. So old a story, and tell it no better? When did such an instrument ever produce such an effect? Either the child smiles in his face; or, most likely, he is not fool enough to put himself in the employer's power so thoroughly: the child is always ready to produce—as you say—howsoever, wheresoever, and whensoever.

Monsignor. Liar!

Intendant. Strike me? Ah, so might a father chastise! I shall sleep soundly to-night at least, though the gallows await me to-morrow; for what a life did I lead! Carlo of Cesena reminds me of his connivance, every time I pay his annuity; which happens commonly thrice a year. If I remonstrate, he will confess all to the good bishop—you!

Monsignor. I see through the trick, caitiff! I would you spoke truth for once. All shall be sifted, however—seven times sifted.

Intendant. And how my absurd riches encumbered me! I dared not lay claim to above half my possessions. Let me but once unbosom myself, glorify Heaven, and die!

Sir, you are no brutal dastardly idiot like your brother I frightened to death: let us understand one another. Sir, I will make away with her for you—the girl—here close at hand; not the stupid obvious kind of killing; do not speak—know nothing of her nor of me! I see her every day—saw her this morning: of course there is to be no killing; but at Rome the courtesans perish off

every three years, and I can entice her thither—
 have indeed begun operations already. There's
 a certain lusty blue-eyed florid-complexioned
 English knave, I and the Police employ occa-
 sionally. You assent, I perceive—no, that's not 210
 it—assent I do not say—but you will let me
 convert my present havings and holdings into
 cash, and give me time to cross the Alps? 'T is
 but a little black-eyed pretty singing Felippa,
 gay silk-winding girl. I have kept her out of 215
 harm's way up to this present; for I always in-
 tended to make your life a plague to you with her.
 'T is as well settled once and for ever. Some
 women I have procured will pass Bluphocks, my
 handsome scoundrel, off for somebody; and once 220
 Pippa entangled!—you conceive? Through her
 singing? Is it a bargain?

[*From without is heard the voice of PIPPA,
 singing—*

*Overhead the tree-tops meet,
 Flowers and grass spring 'neath one's feet;
 There was nought above me, nought below,
 My childhood had not learned to know: 225
 For, what are the voices of birds
 —Ay, and of beasts,—but words, our words,
 Only so much more sweet?
 The knowledge of that with my life begun. 230
 But I had so near made out the sun,
 And counted your stars, the seven and one,
 Like the fingers of my hand:
 Nay, I could all but understand
 Wherefore through heaven the white moon ranges; 235
 And just when out of her soft fifty changes
 No unfamiliar face might overlook me—
 Suddenly God took me.*

[PIPPA passes.

Monsignor [springing up]. My people—one and
 all—all—within there! Gag this villain—tie him 240

hand and foot! He dares . . . I know not half
he dares—but remove him—quick! *Miserere mei,*
Domine! Quick, I say!

SCENE.—PIPPA'S *chamber again.* *She enters it*

The bee with his comb,
The mouse at her dray, 245
The grub in his tomb,
Wile winter away;
But the fire-fly and hedge-shrew and lob-worm,
I pray,
How fare they?
Ha, ha, thanks for your counsel, my Zanze! 250
“Feast upon lampreys, quaff Breganze”—
The summer of life so easy to spend,
And care for to-morrow so soon put away!
But winter hastens at summer's end,
And fire-fly, hedge-shrew, lob-worm, pray, 255
How fare they?
No bidding me then to . . . what did Zanze say?
“Pare your nails pearlwise, get your small feet
shoes
“More like” . . . (what said she?)—“and less
like canoes!”
How pert that girl was!—would I be those pert 260
Impudent staring women! It had done me,
However, surely no such mighty hurt
To learn his name who passed that jest upon me:
No foreigner, that I can recollect,
Came, as she says, a month since, to inspect 265
Our silk-mills—none with blue eyes and thick rings
Of raw-silk-coloured hair, at all events.
Well, if old Luca keep his good intents,
We shall do better, see what next year brings.

I may buy shoes, my Zanze, not appear 270
More destitute than you perhaps next year !
Bluph . . . something ! I had caught the un-
couth name

But for Monsignor's people's sudden clatter
Above us—bound to spoil such idle chatter
As ours : it were indeed a serious matter 275
If silly talk like ours should put to shame
The pious man, the man devoid of blame,
The . . . ah but—ah but, all the same,
No mere mortal has a right

To carry that exalted air ; 280
Best people are not angels quite :
While—not the worst of people's doings scare
The devil ; so there 's that proud look to spare !

Which is mere counsel to myself, mind ! for
I have just been the holy Monsignor : 285
And I was you too, Luigi's gentle mother,
And you too, Luigi !—how that Luigi started
Out of the turret—doubtlessly departed
On some good errand or another,
For he passed just now in a traveller's trim, 290
And the sullen company that prowled
About his path, I noticed, scowled
As if they had lost a prey in him.

And I was Jules the sculptor's bride,
And I was Ottima beside, 295
And now what am I ?—tired of fooling.
Day for folly, night for schooling !
New year's day is over and spent,
Ill or well, I must be content.

Even my lily 's asleep, I vow : 300
Wake up—here 's a friend I 've plucked you :
Call this flower a heart's-ease now !
Something rare, let me instruct you,
Is this, with petals triply swollen,

Three times spotted, thrice the pollen ; 305
While the leaves and parts that witness
Old proportions and their fitness,
Here remain unchanged, unmoved now ;
Call this pampered thing improved now !
Suppose there 's a king of the flowers 310
And a girl-show held in his bowers—
“ Look ye, buds, this growth of ours,”
Says he, “ Zanze from the Brenta,
“ I have made her gorge polenta
“ Till both cheeks are near as bouncing 315
“ As her . . . name there 's no pronouncing !
“ See this heightened colour too,
“ For she swilled Breganze wine
“ Till her nose turned deep carmine ;
“ 'T was but white when wild she grew. 320
“ And only by this Zanze's eyes
“ Of which we could not change the size,
“ The magnitude of all achieved
“ Otherwise, may be perceived.”

Oh what a drear dark close to my poor day ! 325
How could that red sun drop in that black cloud ?
Ah Pippa, morning's rule is moved away,
Dispensed with, never more to be allowed !
Day's turn is over, now arrives the night's.
Oh lark, be day's apostle 330
To mavis, merle and throstle,
Bid them their betters jostle
From day and its delights !
But at night, brother howlet, over the woods,
Toll the world to thy chantry ; 335
Sing to the bats' sleek sisterhoods
Full complines with gallantry :
Then, owls and bats,
Cows and twats,

Monks and nuns, in a cloister's moods, 340
Adjourn to the oak-stump pantry !

[After she has begun to undress herself.]

Now, one thing I should like to really know :
How near I ever might approach all these
I only fancied being, this long day :
—Approach, I mean, so as to touch them, so 345
As to . . . in some way . . . move them—if you
please,

Do good or evil to them some slight way.

For instance, if I wind

Silk to-morrow, my silk may bind

[Sitting on the bedside.]

And border Ottima's cloak's hem. 350

Ah me, and my important part with them,
This morning's hymn half promised when I rose !
True in some sense or other, I suppose.

[As she lies down.]

God bless me ! I can pray no more to-night.
No doubt, some way or other, hymns say right. 355

*All service ranks the same with God—
With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
Are we ; there is no last nor first.*

[She sleeps.]

**KING VICTOR AND
KING CHARLES**

A TRAGEDY

NOTE

So far as I know, this Tragedy is the first artistic consequence of what Voltaire termed "a terrible event without consequences"; and although it professes to be historical, I have taken more pains to arrive at the history than most readers would thank me for particularizing: since acquainted, as I will hope them to be, with the chief circumstances of Victor's remarkable European career—nor quite ignorant of the sad and surprising facts I am about to reproduce (a tolerable account of which is to be found, for instance, in Abbé Roman's *Récit*, or even the fifth of Lord Orrery's Letters from Italy)—I cannot expect them to be versed, nor desirous of becoming so, in all the detail of the memoirs, correspondence, and relations of the time. From these only may be obtained a knowledge of the fiery and audacious temper, unscrupulous selfishness, profound dissimulation, and singular fertility in resources, of Victor—the extreme and painful sensibility, prolonged immaturity of powers, earnest good purpose and vacillating will of Charles—the noble and right woman's manliness of his wife—and the ill-considered rascality and subsequent better-advised rectitude of D'Ormea. When I say, therefore, that I cannot but believe my statement (combining as it does what appears correct in Voltaire and plausible in Condorcet) more true to person and thing than any it has hitherto been my fortune to meet with, no doubt my word will be taken, and my evidence spared as readily.

R. B.

LONDON: 1842.

PERSONS

VICTOR AMADEUS, *first King of Sardinia*

CHARLES EMMANUEL, *his son, Prince of Piedmont*

POLYXENA, *wife of Charles*

D'ORMEA, *minister*

SCENE.—*The Council Chamber of Rivoli Palace, near Turin, communicating with a Hall at the back, an Apartment to the left, and another to the right of the stage*

TIME, 1730-1731

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

1842

FIRST YEAR, 1730.—KING VICTOR

PART I

CHARLES, POLYXENA

Charles. You think so? Well, I do not.

Polyxena. My beloved,
All must clear up ; we shall be happy yet :
This cannot last for ever—oh, may change
To-day or any day !

Charles. —May change ? Ah yes—
May change !

Polyxena. Endure it, then.

Charles. No doubt, a life 5
Like this drags on, now better and now worse.
My father may . . . may take to loving me ;
And he may take D'Ormea closer yet
To counsel him ;—may even cast off her
—That bad Sebastian ; but he also may 10
. . . Or no, Polyxena, my only friend,
He may not force you from me ?

Polyxena. Now, force me
From you !—me, close by you as if there gloomed
No Sebastians, no D'Ormeas on our path—

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

At Rivoli or Turin, still at hand, 15
Arch-counsellor, prime confidant . . . force me !

Charles. Because I felt as sure, as I feel sure
We clasp hands now, of being happy once.
Young was I, quite neglected, nor concerned
By the world's business that engrossed so much 20
My father and my brother : if I peered
From out my privacy,—amid the crash
And blaze of nations, domineered those two.
'T was war, peace—France our foe, now—England,
friend—

In love with Spain—at feud with Austria! Well— 25
I wondered, laughed a moment's laugh for pride
In the chivalrous couple, then let drop
My curtain—"I am out of it," I said—
When . . .

Polyxena. You have told me, Charles.

Charles. Polyxena—

When suddenly,—a warm March day, just that ! 30
Just so much sunshine as the cottage child
Basks in delighted, while the cottager
Takes off his bonnet, as he ceases work,
To catch the more of it—and it must fall
Heavily on my brother ! Had you seen 35
Philip—the lion-featured ! not like me !

Polyxena. I know—

Charles. And Philip's mouth yet fast to mine,
His dead cheek on my cheek, his arm still round
My neck,—they bade me rise, "for I was heir
To the Duke," they said, "the right hand of the
Duke" : 40

Till then he was my father, not the Duke.
So . . . let me finish . . . the whole intricate
World's-business their dead boy was born to, I
Must conquer,—ay, the brilliant thing he was,
I, of a sudden must be : my faults, my follies, 45

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

—All bitter truths were told me, all at once,
To end the sooner. What I simply styled
Their overlooking me, had been contempt :
How should the Duke employ himself, forsooth,
With such an one, while lordly Philip rode 50
By him their Turin through? But he was punished,
And must put up with—me ! 'T was sad enough
To learn my future portion and submit.
And then the wear and worry, blame on blame !
For, spring-sounds in my ears, spring-smells
about, 55
How could I but grow dizzy in their pent
Dim palace-rooms at first? My mother's look
As they discussed my insignificance,
She and my father, and I sitting by,—
I bore ; I knew how brave a son they missed : 60
Philip had gaily run state-papers through,
While Charles was spelling at them painfully !
But Victor was my father spite of that.
“Duke Victor's entire life has been,” I said,
“Innumerable efforts to one end ; 65
“And on the point now of that end's success,
“Our Ducal turning to a Kingly crown,
“Where 's time to be reminded 't is his child
“He spurns?” And so I suffered—scarcely
suffered,
Since I had you at length !

Polyxena. —To serve in place 70
Of monarch, minister, and mistress, Charles.

Charles. But, once that crown obtained, then
was 't not like
Our lot would alter? “When he rests, takes
breath,
“Glances around, sees who there 's left to love—
“Now that my mother 's dead, sees I am left— 75
“Is it not like he 'll love me at the last?”

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Well, Savoy turns Sardinia ; the Duke 's King :
Could I—precisely then—could you expect
His harshness to redouble ? These few months
Have been . . . have been . . . Polyxena, do you 80
And God conduct me, or I lose myself !
What would he have ? What is 't they want with
me ?

Him with this mistress and this minister,
—You see me and you hear him ; judge us both !
Pronounce what I should do, Polyxena ! 85

Polyxena. Endure, endure, beloved ! Say you
not

He is your father ? All 's so incident
To novel sway ! Beside, our life must change :
Or you 'll acquire his kingcraft, or he 'll find
Harshness a sorry way of teaching it. 90
I bear this—not that there 's so much to bear.

Charles. You bear ? Do not I know that you,
tho' bound

To silence for my sake, are perishing
Piecemeal beside me ? And how otherwise
When every creephole from the hideous Court 95
Is stopped : the Minister to dog me, here—
The Mistress posted to entrap you, there !
And thus shall we grow old in such a life ;
Not careless, never estranged,—but old : to alter
Our life, there is so much to alter !

Polyxena. Come— 100

Is it agreed that we forego complaint
Even at Turin, yet complain we here
At Rivoli ? 'T were wiser you announced
Our presence to the King. What 's now afoot
I wonder ? Not that any more 's to dread 105
Than every day's embarrassment : but guess
For me, why train so fast succeeded train
On the high-road, each gayer still than each !

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

I noticed your Archbishop's pursuivant,
The sable cloak and silver cross ; such pomp 110
Bodes . . . what now, Charles? Can you conceive?

Charles. Not I.

Polyxena. A matter of some moment.

Charles. There 's our life !

Which of the group of loiterers that stare
From the lime-avenue, divines that I—
About to figure presently, he thinks, 115
In face of all assembled—am the one
Who knows precisely least about it?

Polyxena. Tush !

D'Ormea's contrivance !

Charles. Ay, how otherwise
Should the young Prince serve for the old King's
foil ?

—So that the simplest courtier may remark 120
'T were idle raising parties for a Prince
Content to linger the Court's laughing-stock.
Something, 't is like, about that weary business

*[Pointing to papers he has laid down, and
which POLYXENA examines.]*

—Not that I comprehend three words, of course,
After all last night's study.

Polyxena. The faint heart ! 125

Why, as we rode and you rehearsed just now
Its substance . . . (that 's the folded speech I
mean,

Concerning the Reduction of the Fiefs)

—What would you have?—I fancied while you
spoke,

Some tones were just your father's.

Charles. Flattery ! 130

Polyxena. I fancied so :—and here lurks, sure
enough,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

My note upon the Spanish Claims! You 've
mastered

The fief-speech thoroughly: this other, mind,

Is an opinion you deliver,—stay,

Best read it slowly over once to me;

Read, there 's bare time; you read it firmly—
loud

135

—Rather loud, looking in his face,—don't sink

Your eye once—ay, thus! “If Spain claims . . .”
begin

—Just as you look at me!

Charles.

At you! Oh truly,

You have I seen, say, marshalling your troops,

140

Dismissing councils, or, through doors ajar,

Head sunk on hand, devoured by slow chagrins

—Then radiant, for a crown had all at once

Seemed possible again! I can behold

Him, whose least whisper ties my spirit fast,

145

In this sweet brow, nought could divert me from

Save objects like Sebastian's shameless lip,

Or worse, the clipped grey hair and dead white
face

And dwindling eye as if it ached with guile,

D'Ormea wears . . .

*[As he kisses her, enter from the KING'S
apartment D'ORMEA.]*

I said he would divert 150

My kisses from your brow!

D'Ormea [aside].

Here! So, King Victor

Spoke truth for once: and who 's ordained, but I

To make that memorable? Both in call,

As he declared. Were 't better gnash the teeth,

Or laugh outright now?

Charles [to POLYXENA]. What 's his visit for?

155

D'Ormea [aside]. I question if they even speak
to me.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Polyxena [to CHARLES]. Face the man ! He 'll suppose you fear him, else.

[*Aloud.*] The Marquis bears the King's command, no doubt ?

D'Ormea [*aside*]. Precisely !—If I threatened him, perhaps ?

Well, this at least is punishment enough ! 160

Men used to promise punishment would come.

Charles. Deliver the King's message, Marquis !

D'Ormea [*aside*]. Ah—

So anxious for his fate ? [*Aloud.*] A word, my Prince,

Before you see your father—just one word
Of counsel !

Charles. Oh, your counsel certainly ! 165

Polyxena, the Marquis counsels us !

Well, sir ? Be brief, however !

D'Ormea. What ? You know

As much as I ?—preceded me, most like,
In knowledge ! So ! ('T is in his eye, beside—
His voice : he knows it, and his heart 's on flame 170
Already.) You surmise why you, myself,
Del Borgo, Spava, fifty nobles more,
Are summoned thus ?

Charles. Is the Prince used to know,
At any time, the pleasure of the King,
Before his minister ?—*Polyxena*, 175
Stay here till I conclude my task : I feel
Your presence (smile not) through the walls, and
take

Fresh heart. The King 's within that chamber ?

D'Ormea [*passing the table whereon a paper lies, exclaims, as he glances at it*]. "Spain !"

Polyxena [*aside to CHARLES*]. Tarry awhile : what
ails the minister ?

D'Ormea. Madam, I do not often trouble you. 180

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

The Prince loathes, and you scorn me—let that pass!

But since it touches him and you, not me,
Bid the Prince listen!

Polyxena [to CHARLES]. Surely you will listen!
—Deceit?—those fingers crumpling up his vest?

Charles. Deceitful to the very fingers' ends! 185

D'Ormea [who has approached them, overlooks the other paper CHARLES continues to hold].

My project for the Fiefs! As I supposed!
Sir, I must give you light upon those measures
—For this is mine, and that I spied of Spain,
Mine too!

Charles. Release me! Do you gloze on me
Who bear in the world's face (that is, the world 190
You make for me at Turin) your contempt?
—Your measures?—When was not a hateful task
D'Ormea's imposition? Leave my robe!
What post can I bestow, what grant concede?
Or do you take me for the King?

D'Ormea. Not I! 195
Not yet for King,—not for, as yet, thank God,
One who in . . . shall I say a year, a month?
Ay!—shall be wretcheder than e'er was slave
In his Sardinia.—Europe's spectacle
And the world's bye-word! What? The Prince
aggrieved 200

That I excluded him our counsels? Here
[Touching the paper in CHARLES'S hand.
Accept a method of extorting gold
From Savoy's nobles, who must wring its worth
In silver first from tillers of the soil,
Whose hinds again have to contribute brass 205
To make up the amount: there's counsel, sir,
My counsel, one year old; and the fruit, this—
Savoy's become a mass of misery

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

And wrath, which one man has to meet—the King :
You 're not the King ! Another counsel, sir ! 210
Spain entertains a project (here it lies)
Which, guessed, makes Austria offer that same
King

Thus much to baffle Spain ; he promises ;
Then comes Spain, breathless lest she be forestalled,
Her offer follows ; and he promises . . . 215

Charles. —Promises, sir, when he has just agreed
To Austria's offer ?

D'Ormea. That 's a counsel, Prince !
But past our foresight, Spain and Austria (choosing
To make their quarrel up between themselves
Without the intervention of a friend) 220
Produce both treaties, and both promises . . .

Charles. How ?

D'Ormea. Prince, a counsel ! And the
fruit of that ?

Both parties covenant afresh, to fall
Together on their friend, blot out his name,
Abolish him from Europe. So, take note, 225
Here 's Austria and here 's Spain to fight against :
And what sustains the King but Savoy here,
A miserable people mad with wrongs ?
You 're not the King !

Charles. Polyxena, you said
All would clear up : all does clear up to me. 230

D'Ormea. Clear up ! 'T is no such thing to
envy, then ?

You see the King's state in its length and breadth ?
You blame me now for keeping you aloof
From counsels and the fruit of counsels ? Wait
Till I explain this morning's business !

Charles [aside]. No— 235
Stoop to my father, yes,—D'Ormea, no :
—The King's son, not to the King's counsellor !

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

I will do something, but at least retain
The credit of my deed. [*Aloud.*] Then it is
this

You now expressly come to tell me?

D'Ormea.

This

240

To tell! You apprehend me?

Charles.

Perfectly.

Further, D'Ormea, you have shown yourself,
For the first time these many weeks and months,
Disposed to do my bidding?

D'Ormea.

From the heart!

Charles. Acquaint my father, first, I wait his
pleasure

245

Next . . . or, I'll tell you at a fitter time.

Acquaint the King!

D'Ormea [*aside*]. If I 'scape Victor yet!

First, to prevent this stroke at me: if not,—

Then, to avenge it! [*To CHARLES.*] Gracious
sir, I go. [*Goes.*]

Charles. God, I forbore! Which more offends,
that man

250

Or that man's master? Is it come to this?

Have they supposed (the sharpest insult yet)

I needed e'en his intervention? No!

No—dull am I, conceded,—but so dull,

Scarcely! Their step decides me.

Polyxena.

How decides? 255

Charles. You would be freed D'Ormea's eye
and hers?

—Could fly the court with me and live content?

So, this it is for which the knights assemble!

The whispers and the closeting of late,

The savageness and insolence of old,

260

—For this!

Polyxena. What mean you?

Charles.

How? You fail to catch

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Their clever plot? I missed it, but could you?
These last two months of care to inculcate
How dull I am,—D'Ormea's present visit
To prove that, being dull, I might be worse 265
Were I a King—as wretched as now dull—
You recognize in it no winding up
Of a long plot?

Polyxena. Why should there be a plot?

Charles. The crown's secure now; I should
shame the crown—

An old complaint; the point is, how to gain 270
My place for one, more fit in Victor's eyes,
His mistress the Sebastian's child.

Polyxena. In truth?

Charles. They dare not quite dethrone Sar-
dinia's Prince:

But they may descant on my dulness till
They sting me into even praying them 275
Grant leave to hide my head, resign my state,
And end the coil. Not see now? In a word,
They'd have me tender them myself my rights
As one incapable;—some cause for that,
Since I delayed thus long to see their drift! 280
I shall apprise the King he may resume
My rights this moment.

Polyxena. Pause! I dare not think
So ill of Victor.

Charles. Think no ill of him!

Polyxena. —Nor think him, then, so shallow as
to suffer

His purpose be divined thus easily. 285
And yet—you are the last of a great line;
There's a great heritage at stake; new days
Seemed to await this newest of the realms
Of Europe:—Charles, you must withstand this!

Charles. Ah—

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

You dare not then renounce the splendid Court 290
For one whom all the world despises? Speak!

Polyxena. My gentle husband, speak I will, and
truth.

Were this as you believe, and I once sure
Your duty lay in so renouncing rule,
I could . . . could? Oh what happiness it were— 295
To live, my Charles, and die, alone with you!

Charles. I grieve I asked you. To the presence,
then!

By this, D'Ormea acquaints the King, no doubt,
He fears I am too simple for mere hints,
And that no less will serve than Victor's mouth 300
Demonstrating in council what I am.

I have not breathed, I think, these many years!

Polyxena. Why, it may be!—if he desire to wed
That woman, call legitimate her child.

Charles. You see as much? Oh, let his will
have way! 305

You 'll not repent confiding in me, love?
There 's many a brighter spot in Piedmont, far,
Than Rivoli. I 'll seek him : or, suppose
You hear first how I mean to speak my mind?
—Loudly and firmly both, this time, be sure! 310
I yet may see your Rhine-land, who can tell?
Once away, ever then away! I breathe.

Polyxena. And I too breathe.

Charles. Come, my Polyxena!

KING VICTOR

PART II

Enter King VICTOR, bearing the Regalia on a cushion, from his apartment. He calls loudly

Victor. D'Ormea!—for patience fails me, treading thus

Among the obscure trains I have laid,—my knights 315
Safe in the hall here—in that anteroom,
My son,—D'Ormea, where? Of this, one touch—
[*Laying down the crown.*

This fireball to these mute black cold trains—then
Outbreak enough!

[*Contemplating it.*] To lose all, after all!
This, glancing o'er my house for ages—shaped, 320
Brave meteor, like the crown of Cyprus now,
Jerusalem, Spain, England, every change
The braver,—and when I have clutched a prize
My ancestry died wan with watching for,
To lose it!—by a slip, a fault, a trick 325
Learnt to advantage once and not unlearned
When past the use,—“just this once more” (I
thought)

“Use it with Spain and Austria happily,
“And then away with trick!” An oversight
I'd have repaired thrice over, any time 330
These fifty years, must happen now! There's peace
At length; and I, to make the most of peace,
Ventured my project on our people here,
As needing not their help: which Europe knows,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

And means, cold-blooded, to dispose herself 335
(Apart from plausibilities of war)

To crush the new-made King—who ne'er till now
Feared her. As Duke, I lost each foot of earth
And laughed at her: my name was left, my sword
Left, all was left! But she can take, she knows, 340
This crown, herself conceded . . . That's to try,
Kind Europe! My career's not closed as yet!
This boy was ever subject to my will,
Timid and tame—the fitter! D'Ormea, too—
What if the sovereign also rid himself 345
Of thee, his prime of parasites?—I delay!

D'Ormea! *[As D'ORMEA enters, the
KING seats himself.*

My son, the Prince—attends he?

D'Ormea.

Sir,

He does attend. The crown prepared!—it seems
That you persist in your resolve.

Victor.

Who's come?

The chancellor and the chamberlain? My knights? 350

D'Ormea. The whole Annunziata. If, my liege,
Your fortune had not tottered worse than now . . .

Victor. Del Borgo has drawn up the schedules?
mine—

My son's, too? Excellent! Only, beware
Of the least blunder, or we look but fools. 355
First, you read the Annulment of the Oaths;
Del Borgo follows . . . no, the Prince shall sign;
Then let Del Borgo read the Instrument:
On which, I enter.

D'Ormea.

Sir, this may be truth;

You, sir, may do as you affect—may break 360
Your engine, me, to pieces: try at least
If not a spring remain worth saving! Take
My counsel as I've counselled many times!
What if the Spaniard and the Austrian threat?

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

There 's England, Holland, Venice—which ally 365
Select you ?

Victor. Aha ! Come, D'Ormea,—“ truth ”
Was on your lip a minute since. Allies ?
I 've broken faith with Venice, Holland, Eng-
land

—As who knows if not you ?

D'Ormea. But why with me
Break faith—with one ally, your best, break faith ? 370

Victor. When first I stumbled on you, Marquis
—'t was

At Mondovi—a little lawyer's clerk . . .

D'Ormea. Therefore your soul's ally !—who
brought you through

Your quarrel with the Pope, at pains enough—
Who simply echoed you in these affairs— 375
On whom you cannot therefore visit these
Affairs' ill-fortune—whom you trust to guide
You safe (yes, on my soul) through these affairs !

Victor. I was about to notice, had you not
Prevented me, that since that great town kept 380
With its chicane D'Ormea's satchel stuffed
And D'Ormea's self sufficiently recluse,
He missed a sight,—my naval armament
When I burned Toulon. How the skiff exults
Upon the galliot's wave !—rises its height, 385
O'ertops it even ; but the great wave bursts,
And hell-deep in the horrible profound
Buries itself the galliot : shall the skiff
Think to escape the sea's black trough in turn ?
Apply this : you have been my minister 390
—Next me, above me possibly ;—sad post,
Huge care, abundant lack of peace of mind ;
Who would desiderate the eminence ?

You gave your soul to get it ; you 'd yet give
Your soul to keep it, as I mean you shall, 395

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

D'Ormea ! What if the wave ebb'd with me ?

Whereas it cants you to another crest ;

I toss you to my son ; ride out your ride !

D'Ormea. Ah, you so much despise me ?

Victor.

You, D'Ormea ?

Nowise : and I 'll inform you why. A king 400

Must in his time have many ministers,

And I 've been rash enough to part with mine

When I thought proper. Of the tribe, not one
(. . . Or wait, did Pianezzé ?—ah, just the same !)

Not one of them, ere his remonstrance reached 405

The length of yours, but has assured me (commonly

Standing much as you stand,—or nearer, say,

The door to make his exit on his speech)

—I should repent of what I did. D'Ormea,

Be candid, you approached it when I bade you 410

Prepare the schedules ! But you stopped in time,

You have not so assured me : how should I

Despise you then ?

Enter CHARLES

Victor [*changing his tone*]. Are you instructed ?

Do

My order, point by point ! About it, sir !

D'Ormea. You so despise me ! [*Aside.*] One

last stay remains—

415

The boy's discretion there.

[*To CHARLES.*] For your sake, Prince,

I pleaded, wholly in your interest,

To save you from this fate !

Charles [*aside*].

Must I be told

The Prince was supplicated for—by him ?

Victor [*to D'ORMEA*]. Apprise Del Borgo,

Spava, and the rest,

420

Our son attends them ; then return.

D'Ormea.

One word !

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Charles [aside]. A moment's pause and they
would drive me hence,

I do believe !

D'Ormea [aside]. Let but the boy be firm !

Victor. You disobey ?

Charles [to D'ORMEA]. You do not disobey
Me, at least ? Did you promise that or no ? 425

D'Ormea. Sir, I am yours : what would you ?

Yours am I !

Charles. When I have said what I shall say, 't
is like

Your face will ne'er again disgust me. Go !
Through you, as through a breast of glass, I see.
And for your conduct, from my youth till now, 430
Take my contempt ! You might have spared me
much,

Secured me somewhat, nor so harmed yourself :
That 's over now. Go, ne'er to come again !

D'Ormea. As son, the father—father as, the son !
My wits ! My wits ! [Goes.

Victor [seated]. And you, what meant you, pray, 435
Speaking thus to D'Ormea ?

Charles. Let us not
Waste words upon D'Ormea ! Those I spent
Have half unsettled what I came to say.
His presence vexes to my very soul.

Victor. One called to manage a kingdom, Charles,
needs heart 440
To bear up under worse annoyances
Than seems D'Ormea—to me, at least.

Charles [aside]. Ah, good !
He keeps me to the point. Then be it so.
[Aloud.] Last night, sir, brought me certain papers
—these—

To be reported on,—your way of late. 445
Is it last night's result that you demand ?

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Victor. For God's sake, what has night brought forth? Pronounce

The . . . what 's your word?—result!

Charles. Sir, that had proved Quite worthy of your sneer, no doubt :—a few
Lame thoughts, regard for you alone could wring, 450
Lame as they are, from brains like mine, believe!
As 't is, sir, I am spared both toil and sneer.
These are the papers.

Victor. Well, sir? I suppose
You hardly burned them. Now for your result!

Charles. I never should have done great things
of course, 455
But . . . oh my father, had you loved me more!

Victor. Loved? [*Aside.*] Has D'Ormea played
me false, I wonder?

[*Aloud.*] Why, Charles, a king's love is diffused—
yourself

May overlook, perchance, your part in it.
Our monarchy is absolutest now 460

In Europe, or my trouble 's thrown away.
I love, my mode, that subjects each and all
May have the power of loving, all and each,
Their mode : I doubt not, many have their sons
To trifle with, talk soft to, all day long : 465

I have that crown, this chair, D'Ormea, Charles!

Charles. 'T is well I am a subject then, not you.

Victor [*aside*]. D'Ormea has told him every-
thing.

[*Aloud.*] Aha!

I apprehend you : when all 's said, you take
Your private station to be prized beyond 470
My own, for instance?

Charles. —Do and ever did
So take it : 't is the method you pursue
That grieves . . .

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Victor. These words! Let me express,
my friend,
Your thoughts. You penetrate what I supposed
Secret. D'Ormea plies his trade betimes! 475
I purpose to resign my crown to you.

Charles. To me?

Victor. Now,—in that chamber.

Charles. You resign
The crown to me?

Victor. And time enough, Charles, sure?
Confess with me, at four-and-sixty years
A crown's a load. I covet quiet once 480
Before I die, and summoned you for that.

Charles. 'T is I will speak: you ever hated me.
I bore it,—have insulted me, borne too—
Now you insult yourself; and I remember
What I believed you, what you really are, 485
And cannot bear it. What! My life has passed
Under your eye, tormented as you know,—
Your whole sagacities, one after one,
At leisure brought to play on me—to prove me
A fool, I thought and I submitted; now 490
You'd prove . . . what would you prove me?

Victor. This to me?
I hardly know you!

Charles. Know me? Oh indeed
You do not! Wait till I complain next time
Of my simplicity!—for here's a sage
Knows the world well, is not to be deceived, 495
And his experience and his Macchiavels,
D'Ormeas, teach him—what?—that I this while
Have envied him his crown! He has not smiled,
I warrant,—has not eaten, drunk, nor slept,
For I was plotting with my Princess yonder! 500
Who knows what we might do or might not do?
Go now, be politic, astound the world!

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

That sentry in the antechamber—nay,
The varlet who disposed this precious trap
[*Pointing to the crown.*

That was to take me—ask them if they think
Their own sons envy them their posts!—Know me! 505

Victor. But you know me, it seems : so, learn
in brief,

My pleasure. This assembly is convened . . .

Charles. Tell me, that woman put it in your head!
You were not sole contriver of the scheme, 510
My father!

Victor. Now observe me, sir! I jest
Seldom—on these points, never. Here, I say,
The knights assemble to see me concede,
And you accept, Sardinia's crown.

Charles. Farewell!

'T were vain to hope to change this : I can end it. 515
Not that I cease from being yours, when sunk
Into obscurity : I 'll die for you,
But not annoy you with my presence. Sir,
Farewell! Farewell!

Enter D'ORMEA

D'Ormea [*aside*]. Ha, sure he's changed again—
Means not to fall into the cunning trap! 520

Then Victor, I shall yet escape you, Victor!

Victor [*suddenly placing the crown upon the head of*
CHARLES]. D'Ormea, your King!

[*To CHARLES*]. My son, obey me! Charles,
Your father, clearer-sighted than yourself,
Decides it must be so. 'Faith, this looks real!

My reasons after ; reason upon reason 525
After : but now, obey me! Trust in me!

By this, you save Sardinia, you save me!
Why, the boy swoons! [*To D'ORMEA.*] Come
this side!

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

D'Ormea [*as CHARLES turns from him to VICTOR*].
You persist?

Victor. Yes, I conceive the gesture's meaning.
'Faith,

He almost seems to hate you : how is that ? 530
Be re-assured, my Charles ! Is 't over now ?

Then, Marquis, tell the new King what remains
To do ! A moment's work. Del Borgo reads
The Act of Abdication out, you sign it,
Then I sign ; after that, come back to me. 535

D'Ormea. Sir, for the last time, pause !

Victor. Five minutes longer
I am your sovereign, Marquis. Hesitate—
And I 'll so turn those minutes to account
That . . . Ay, you recollect me ! [*Aside.*] Could
I bring

My foolish mind to undergo the reading 540
That Act of Abdication !

[*As CHARLES motions D'ORMEA to precede him.*

Thanks, dear Charles !

[*CHARLES and D'ORMEA retire.*

Victor. A novel feature in the boy,—indeed
Just what I feared he wanted most. Quite right,
This earnest tone : your truth, now, for effect !
It answers every purpose : with that look, 545

That voice,—I hear him : “ I began no treaty,”
(He speaks to Spain), “ nor ever dreamed of this
“ You show me ; this I from my soul regret ;

“ But if my father signed it, bid not me
“ Dishonour him—who gave me all, beside : ” 550

And, “ True,” says Spain, “ 't were harsh to visit
that

“ Upon the Prince.” Then come the nobles troop-
ing :

“ I grieve at these exactions—I had cut

“ This hand off ere impose them ; but shall I

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

"Undo my father's deed?"—and they confer : 555

"Doubtless he was no party, after all ;

"Give the Prince time !"

Ay, give us time, but time !

Only, he must not, when the dark day comes,
Refer our friends to me and frustrate all.

We 'll have no child's play, no desponding fits, 560

No Charles at each cross turn entreating Victor
To take his crown again. Guard against that !

Enter D'ORMEA

Long live King Charles !

No—Charles's counsellor !

Well, is it over, Marquis ? Did I jest ?

D'Ormea. "King Charles !" What then may
you be ?

Victor.

Anything ! 565

A country gentleman that, cured of bustle,
Now beats a quick retreat toward Chambery,
Would hunt and hawk and leave you noisy folk
To drive your trade without him. I 'm Count
Remont—

Count Tende—any little place's Count ! 570

D'Ormea. Then Victor, Captain against Catinat
At Staffarde, where the French beat you ; and
Duke

At Turin, where you beat the French ; King late
Of Savoy, Piedmont, Montferrat, Sardinia,
—Now, "any little place's Count"—

Victor.

Proceed ! 575

D'Ormea. Breaker of vows to God, who crowned
you first ;

Breaker of vows to man, who kept you since ;
Most profligate to me who outraged God
And man to serve you, and am made pay crimes
I was but privy to, by passing thus

580

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

To your imbecile son—who, well you know,
Must—(when the people here, and nations
there,

Clamour for you the main delinquent, slipped
From King to—"Count of any little place")

Must needs surrender me, all in his reach,— 585

I, sir, forgive you : for I see the end—

See you on your return—(you will return)—

To him you trust, a moment . . .

Victor.

Trust him? How?

My poor man, merely a prime-minister,

Make me know where my trust errs!

D'Ormea.

In his fear, 590

His love, his—— but discover for yourself

What you are weakest, trusting in!

Victor.

Aha,

D'Ormea, not a shrewder scheme than this

In your repertory? You know old Victor—

Vain, choleric, inconstant, rash—(I 've heard 595

Talkers who little thought the King so close)

Felicitous now, were 't not, to provoke him

To clean forget, one minute afterward,

His solemn act, and call the nobles back

And pray them give again the very power 600

He has abjured?—for the dear sake of what?

Vengeance on you, D'Ormea! No : such am I,

Count Tende or Count anything you please,

—Only, the same that did the things you say,

And, among other things you say not, used 605

Your finest fibre, meanest muscle,—you

I used, and now, since you will have it so,

Leave to your fate—mere lumber in the midst,

You and your works. Why, what on earth beside

Are you made for, you sort of ministers? 610

D'Ormea. Not left, though, to my fate! Your
witless son

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Has more wit than to load himself with lumber :
He foils you that way, and I follow you.

Victor. Stay with my son—protect the weaker side !

D'Ormea. Ay, to be tossed the people like
a rag,

615

And flung by them for Spain and Austria's sport,
Abolishing the record of your part
In all this perfidy !

Victor. Prevent, beside,

My own return !

D'Ormea. That 's half prevented now !

'T will go hard but you find a wondrous charm

620

In exile, to discredit me. The Alps,
Silk-mills to watch, vines asking vigilance—
Hounds open for the stag, your hawk 's a-wing—
Brave days that wait the Louis of the South,
Italy's Janus !

Victor. So, the lawyer's clerk

625

Won't tell me that I shall repent !

D'Ormea.

You give me

Full leave to ask if you repent ?

Victor.

Whene'er

Sufficient time 's elapsed for that, you judge !

[*Shouts inside* "KING CHARLES !"]

D'Ormea. Do you repent ?

Victor [*after a slight pause*]. . . . I 've kept them
waiting ? Yes !

Come in, complete the Abdication, sir !

630

[*They go out.*]

Enter POLYXENA

Polyxena. A shout ! The sycophants are free
of Charles !

Oh is not this like Italy ? No fruit
Of his or my distempered fancy, this,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

But just an ordinary fact ! Beside,
Here they've set forms for such proceedings ; Victor 635
Imprisoned his own mother : he should know,
If any, how a son 's to be deprived
Of a son's right. Our duty 's palpable.
Ne'er was my husband for the wily king
And the unworthy subjects : be it so ! 640
Come you safe out of them, my Charles ! Our
life

Grows not the broad and dazzling life, I dreamed
Might prove your lot ; for strength was shut in
you

None guessed but I—strength which, untrammelled
once,

Had little shamed your vaunted ancestry— 645
Patience and self-devotion, fortitude,
Simplicity and utter truthfulness
—All which, they shout to lose !

So, now my work
Begins—to save him from regret. Save Charles
Regret?—the noble nature ! He 's not made 650
Like these Italians : 't is a German soul.

CHARLES enters crowned

Oh, where 's the King's heir ? Gone !—the Crown
Prince ? Gone !—

Where 's Savoy ? Gone !—Sardinia ? Gone !
But Charles

Is left ! And when my Rhine-land bowers arrive,
If he looked almost handsome yester-twilight 655
As his grey eyes seemed widening into black
Because I praised him, then how will he look ?
Farewell, you stripped and whited mulberry-trees
Bound each to each by lazy ropes of vine !
Now I 'll teach you my language : I 'm not forced 660
To speak Italian now, Charles ?

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

[*She sees the crown.*] What is this?
Answer me—who has done this? Answer!

Charles. He!
I am King now.

Polyxena. Oh worst, worst, worst of all!
Tell me! What, Victor? He has made you King?
What 's he then? What 's to follow this? You,
King? 665

Charles. Have I done wrong? Yes, for you
were not by!

Polyxena. Tell me from first to last.

Charles. Hush—a new world
Brightens before me; he is moved away
—The dark form that eclipsed it, he subsides
Into a shape supporting me like you, 670
And I, alone, tend upward, more and more
Tend upward: I am grown Sardinia's King.

Polyxena. Now stop: was not this Victor, Duke
of Savoy
At ten years old?

Charles. He was.

Polyxena. And the Duke spent
Since then, just four-and-fifty years in toil 675
To be—what?

Charles. King.

Polyxena. Then why unking himself?

Charles. Those years are cause enough.

Polyxena. The only cause?

Charles. Some new perplexities.

Polyxena. Which you can solve
Although he cannot?

Charles. He assures me so.

Polyxena. And this he means shall last—how
long?

Charles. How long? 680
Think you I fear the perils I confront?

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

He 's praising me before the people's face—
My people !

Polyxena. Then he 's changed—grown kind, the
King?

Where can the trap be ?

Charles. Heart and soul I pledge !
My father, could I guard the crown you gained, 685
Transmit as I received it,—all good else
Would I surrender !

Polyxena. Ah, it opens then
Before you, all you dreaded formerly ?
You are rejoiced to be a king, my Charles ?

Charles. So much to dare ? The better ;—much
to dread ? 690

The better. I 'll adventure though alone.
Triumph or die, there 's Victor still to witness
Who dies or triumphs—either way, alone !

Polyxena. Once I had found my share in triumph,
Charles,
Or death.

Charles. But you are I ! But you I call 695
To take, Heaven's proxy, vows I tendered Heaven
A moment since. I will deserve the crown !

Polyxena. You will. [*Aside.*] No doubt it were
a glorious thing
For any people, if a heart like his
Ruled over it. I would I saw the trap. 700

Enter VICTOR

'T is he must show me.

Victor. So, the mask falls off
An old man's foolish love at last. Spare thanks !
I know you, and Polyxena I know.
Here 's Charles—I am his guest now—does he
bid me
Be seated ? And my light-haired blue-eyed child 705

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Must not forget the old man far away
At Chambery, who dozes while she reigns.

Polyxena. Most grateful shall we now be, talking least
Of gratitude—indeed of anything
That hinders what yourself must need to say 710
To Charles.

Charles. Pray speak, sir!

Victor. 'Faith, not much to say :
Only what shows itself, you once i' the point
Of sight. You 're now the King : you 'll comprehend
Much you may oft have wondered at—the shifts,
Dissimulation, wiliness I showed. 715
For what 's our post? Here 's Savoy and here 's
Piedmont,

Here's Montferrat—a breadth here, a space there—
To o'ersweep all these, what 's one weapon worth?
I often think of how they fought in Greece :
(Or Rome, which was it? You 're the scholar,
Charles!) 720

You made a front-thrust? But if your shield
too

Were not adroitly planted, some shrewd knave
Reached you behind ; and him foiled, straight if
thong

And handle of that shield were not cast loose,
And you enabled to outstrip the wind, 725
Fresh foes assailed you, either side ; 'scape
these,

And reach your place of refuge—e'en then, odds
If the gate opened unless breath enough
Were left in you to make its lord a speech.

Oh, you will see !

Charles. No : straight on shall I go, 730
Truth helping ; win with it or die with it.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Victor. 'Faith, Charles, you 're not made
Europe's fighting-man!

The barrier-guarder, if you please. You clutch
Hold and consolidate, with envious France
This side, with Austria that, the territory 735
I held—ay, and will hold . . . which *you* shall hold
Despite the couple! But I've surely earned
Exemption from these weary politics,
—The privilege to prattle with my son
And daughter here, though Europe wait the while. 740

Polyxena. Nay, sir,—at Chambery, away for
ever,

As soon you will be, 't is farewell we bid you :
Turn these few fleeting moments to account !
'T is just as though it were a death.

Victor. Indeed !

Polyxena [*aside*]. Is the trap there ?

Charles. Ay, call this parting—death ! 745
The sacredder your memory becomes.
If I misrule Sardinia, how bring back
My father ?

Victor. I mean . . .

Polyxena [*who watches VICTOR narrowly this
while*]. Your father does not mean
You should be ruling for your father's sake :
It is your people must concern you wholly 750
Instead of him. You mean this, sir ? (He drops
My hand !)

Charles. That people is now part of me.

Victor. About the people ! I took certain
measures

Some short time since . . . Oh, I know well, you
know

But little of my measures ! These affect 755
The nobles ; we've resumed some grants, imposed
A tax or two : prepare yourself, in short,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

For clamour on that score. Mark me : you yield
No jot of aught entrusted you !

Polyxena. No jot
You yield !

Charles. My father, when I took the oath, 760
Although my eye might stray in search of yours,
I heard it, understood it, promised God
What you require. Till from this eminence
He move me, here I keep, nor shall concede
The meanest of my rights.

Victor [aside]. The boy 's a fool ! 765
—Or rather, I 'm a fool : for, what 's wrong here ?
To-day the sweets of reigning : let to-morrow
Be ready with its bitters.

Enter D'ORMEA

There 's beside
Somewhat to press upon your notice first.

Charles. Then why delay it for an instant, sir ? 770
That Spanish claim perchance ? And, now you
speak,

—This morning, my opinion was mature,
Which, boy-like, I was bashful in producing
To one I ne'er am like to fear in future !
My thought is formed upon that Spanish claim. 775

Victor. Betimes indeed. Not now, Charles !
You require

A host of papers on it.

D'Ormea [coming forward]. Here they are.
[*To CHARLES.*] I, sir, was minister and much beside
Of the late monarch ; to say little, him
I served : on you I have, to say e'en less, 780
No claim. This case contains those papers : with
them

I tender you my office.

Victor [hastily]. Keep him, Charles !

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

There 's reason for it—many reasons : you
 Distrust him, nor are so far wrong there,—but
 He 's mixed up in this matter—he 'll desire 785
 To quit you, for occasions known to me :
 Do not accept those reasons : have him stay !

Polyxena [*aside*]. His minister thrust on us !

Charles [*to D'ORMEA*]. Sir, believe,

In justice to myself, you do not need
 E'en this commending : howsoe'er might seem 790
 My feelings toward you, as a private man,
 They quit me in the vast and untried field
 Of action. Though I shall myself (as late
 In your own hearing I engaged to do)
 Preside o'er my Sardinia, yet your help 795
 Is necessary. Think the past forgotten
 And serve me now !

D'Ormea. I did not offer you

My service—would that I could serve you, sir !

As for the Spanish matter . . .

Victor. But despatch

At least the dead, in my good daughter's phrase, 800
 Before the living ! Help to house me safe
 Ere with D'Ormea you set the world a-gape !
 Here is a paper—will you overlook
 What I propose reserving for my needs ?

I get as far from you as possible : 805

Here 's what I reckon my expenditure.

Charles [*reading*]. A miserable fifty thousand
 crowns—

Victor. Oh, quite enough for country gentlemen !
 Beside the exchequer happens . . . but find out
 All that, yourself !

Charles [*still reading*]. "Count Tende"—what
 means this ? 810

Victor. Me: you were but an infant when I burst
 Through the defile of Tende upon France.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Had only my allies kept true to me!
No matter. Tende 's, then, a name I take
Just as . . .

D'Ormea. —The Marchioness Sebastian takes 815
The name of Spigno.

Charles. How, sir?

Victor [to D'ORMEA]. Fool! All that
Was for my own detailing. [To CHARLES.] That
anon!

Charles [to D'ORMEA]. Explain what you have
said, sir!

D'Ormea. I supposed
The marriage of the King to her I named,
Profoundly kept a secret these few weeks, 820
Was not to be one, now he 's Count.

Polyxena [aside]. With us
The minister—with him the mistress!

Charles [to VICTOR]. No—
Tell me you have not taken her—that woman
To live with, past recall!

Victor. And where 's the crime . . .

Polyxena [to CHARLES]. True, sir, this is a matter 825
past recall

And past your cognizance. A day before,
And you had been compelled to note this: now,—
Why note it? The King saved his House from
shame:

What the Count did, is no concern of yours.

Charles [after a pause]. The Spanish claim,
D'Ormea!

Victor. Why, my son, 830

I took some ill-advised . . . one's age, in fact,
Spoils everything: though I was overreached,
A younger brain, we 'll trust, may extricate
Sardinia readily. To-morrow, D'Ormea,
Inform the King!

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

D'Ormea [*without regarding VICTOR, and leisurely*]. Thus stands the case with Spain : 835
When first the Infant Carlos claimed his proper
Succession to the throne of Tuscany . . .

Victor. I tell you, that stands over ! Let that
rest !

There is the policy !

Charles [*to D'ORMEA*]. Thus much I know,
And more—too much : the remedy ?

D'Ormea. Of course ! 840

No glimpse of one.

Victor. No remedy at all !

It makes the remedy itself—time makes it.

D'Ormea [*to CHARLES*]. But if . . .

Victor [*still more hastily*]. In fine, I shall
take care of that :

And, with another project that I have . . .

D'Ormea [*turning on him*]. Oh, since Count
Tende means to take again 845

King Victor's crown !—

Polyxena [*throwing herself at VICTOR's feet*]. E'en
now retake it, sir !

Oh speak ! We are your subjects both, once more !

Say it—a word effects it ! You meant not,

Nor do mean now, to take it : but you must !

'T is in you—in your nature—and the shame 's 850

Not half the shame 't would grow to afterwards !

Charles. Polyxena !

Polyxena. A word recalls the knights—

Say it ! What 's promising and what 's the past ?

Say you are still King Victor !

D'Ormea.

Better say

The Count repents, in brief ! [*VICTOR rises*].

Charles.

With such a crime 855

I have not charged you, sir !

Polyxena.

(Charles turns from me !)

SECOND YEAR, 1731.—KING CHARLES

PART I

Enter Queen POLYXENA and D'ORMEA.—A pause

Polyxena. And now, sir, what have you to say ?

D'Ormea. Count Tende . . .

Polyxena. Affirm not I betrayed you ; you resolve
On uttering this strange intelligence

—Nay, post yourself to find me ere I reach
The capital, because you know King Charles 5
Tarries a day or two at Evian Baths

Behind me :—but take warning,—here and thus
[*Seating herself in the royal seat.*

I listen, if I listen—not your friend.

Explicitly the statement, if you still

Persist to urge it on me, must proceed : 10

I am not made for aught else.

D'Ormea. Good ! Count Tende . . .

Polyxena. I, who mistrust you, shall acquaint
King Charles

Who even more mistrusts you.

D'Ormea. Does he so ?

Polyxena. Why should he not ?

D'Ormea. Ay, why not ? Motives, seek
You virtuous people, motives ! Say, I serve 15
God at the devil's bidding—will that do ?

I 'm proud : our people have been pacified,
Really I know not how—

Polyxena. By truthfulness.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

D'Ormea. Exactly ; that shows I had nought
to do

With pacifying them. Our foreign perils 20

Also exceed my means to stay : but here

'T is otherwise, and my pride 's piqued. Count
Tende

Completes a full year's absence : would you,
madam,

Have the old monarch back, his mistress back,

His measures back ? I pray you, act upon 25

My counsel, or they will be.

Polyxena.

When ?

D'Ormea.

Let 's think.

Home-matters settled—Victor 's coming now ;

Let foreign matters settle—Victor 's here

Unless I stop him ; as I will, this way.

Polyxena [*reading the papers he presents*]. If this
should prove a plot 'twixt you and Victor ? 30

You seek annoyances to give the pretext

For what you say you fear.

D'Ormea.

Oh, possibly !

I go for nothing. Only show King Charles

That thus Count Tende purposes return,

And style me his inviter, if you please ! 35

Polyxena. Half of your tale is true ; most like,
the Count

Seeks to return : but why stay you with us ?

To aid in such emergencies.

D'Ormea.

Keep safe

Those papers : or, to serve me, leave no proof

I thus have counselled ! When the Count returns, 40

And the King abdicates, 't will stead me little

To have thus counselled.

Polyxena.

The King abdicate !

D'Ormea. He 's good, we knew long since—
wise, we discover—

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Firm, let us hope :—but I 'd have gone to work
With him away. Well!

[CHARLES *without.*] In the Council Chamber? 45
D'Ormea. All 's lost!

Polyxena. Oh, surely not King Charles!
He 's changed—

That 's not this year's scare-burthened voice and step:
'T is last year's step, the Prince's voice!

D'Ormea. I know.

[Enter CHARLES :—D'ORMEA *retiring a little.*

Charles. Now wish me joy, Polyxena! Wish
it me

The old way! [She embraces him.

There was too much cause for that! 50

But I have found myself again. What news

At Turin? Oh, if you but felt the load

I 'm free of—free! I said this year would end

Or it, or me—but I am free, thank God!

Polyxena. How, Charles?

Charles. You do not guess?

The day I found

Sardinia's hideous coil, at home, abroad, 55

And how my father was involved in it,—

Of course, I vowed to rest and smile no more

Until I cleared his name from obloquy.

We did the people right—'t was much to gain 60

That point, redress our nobles' grievance, too—

But that took place here, was no crying shame :

All must be done abroad,—if I abroad

Appeased the justly-angered Powers, destroyed

The scandal, took down Victor's name at last 65

From a bad eminence, I then might breathe

And rest! No moment was to lose. Behold

The proud result—a Treaty, Austria, Spain

Agree to—

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

D'Ormea [*aside*]. I shall merely stipulate
For an experienced headsman.

Charles. Not a soul 70
Is compromised : the blotted past 's a blank :
Even *D'Ormea* escapes unquestioned. See !
It reached me from Vienna ; I remained
At Evian to despatch the Count his news ;
'T is gone to Chambery a week ago— 75
And here am I : do I deserve to feel
Your warm white arms around me ?

D'Ormea [*coming forward*]. He knows that ?

Charles. What, in Heaven's name, means this ?

D'Ormea. He knows that matters
Are settled at Vienna ? Not too late !
Plainly, unless you post this very hour 80
Some man you trust (say, me) to Chambery
And take precautions I acquaint you with,
Your father will return here.

Charles. Are you crazed,
D'Ormea ? Here ? For what ? As well return
To take his crown !

D'Ormea. He will return for that. 85

Charles [*to POLYXENA*]. You have not listened
to this man ?

Polyxena. He spoke
About your safety—and I listened.

[*He disengages himself from her arms.*]

Charles [*to D'ORMEA*]. What
Apprised you of the Count's intentions ?

D'Ormea. Me ?
His heart, sir ; you may not be used to read
Such evidence however ; therefore read 90
[*Pointing to POLYXENA's papers.*]

My evidence.

Charles [*to POLYXENA*]. Oh, worthy this of you !
And of your speech I never have forgotten,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Though I professed forgetfulness; which haunts me
 As if I did not know how false it was ;
 Which made me toil unconsciously thus long 95
 That there might be no least occasion left
 For aught of its prediction coming true !
 And now, when there is left no least occasion
 To instigate my father to such crime—
 When I might venture to forget (I hoped) 100
 That speech and recognize Polyxena—
 Oh worthy, to revive, and tenfold worse,
 That plague ! D'Ormea at your ear, his slanders
 Still in your hand ! Silent ?

Polyxena. As the wronged are.

Charles. And you, D'Ormea, since when have
 you presumed 105
 To spy upon my father ? I conceive
 What that wise paper shows, and easily.
 Since when ?

D'Ormea. The when and where and how belong
 To me. 'T is sad work, but I deal in such.
 You oft-times serve yourself ; I 'd serve you here : 110
 Use makes me not so squeamish. In a word,
 Since the first hour he went to Chambery,
 Of his seven servants, five have I suborned.

Charles. You hate my father ?

D'Ormea. Oh, just as you will !

[*Looking at* POLYXENA.]

A minute since, I loved him—hate him, now ! 115
 What matter ?—if you ponder just one thing :
 Has he that treaty ?—he is setting forward
 Already. Are your guards here ?

Charles.

Well for you

They are not ! [*To* POLYXENA.] Him I knew of
 old, but you—

To hear that pickthank, further his designs ! 120

[*To* D'ORMEA.]

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Guards?—were they here, I 'd bid them, for your trouble,

Arrest you.

D'Ormea. Guards you shall not want. I lived
The servant of your choice, not of your need.

You never greatly needed me till now

That you discard me. This is my arrest.

125

Again I tender you my charge—its duty

Would bid me press you read those documents.

Here, sir!

[*Offering his badge of office.*]

Charles [*taking it*]. The papers also! Do you think

I dare not read them?

Polyxena.

Read them, sir!

Charles.

They prove,

My father, still a month within the year

130

Since he so solemnly consigned it me,

Means to resume his crown? They shall prove that,

Or my best dungeon . . .

D'Ormea.

Even say, Chambery!

'T is vacant, I surmise, by this.

Charles.

You prove

Your words or pay their forfeit, sir. Go there!

135

Polyxena, one chance to rend the veil

Thickening and blackening 'twixt us two! Do say,

You 'll see the falsehood of the charges proved!

Do say, at least, you wish to see them proved

False charges—my heart's love of other times!

140

Polyxena. Ah, Charles!

Charles [*to D'ORMEA*]. Precede me, sir!

D'Ormea.

And I 'm at length

A martyr for the truth! No end, they say,

Of miracles. My conscious innocence!

[*As they go out, enter—by the middle door, at which he pauses—VICTOR.*]

Victor. Sure I heard voices? No. Well, I do best

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

To make at once for this, the heart o' the place. 145
 The old room! Nothing changed! Sonear my seat,
 D'Ormea? [*Pushing away the stool which
 is by the KING's chair.*]

I want that meeting over first,
 I know not why. Tush, he, D'Ormea, slow
 To hearten me, the supple knave? That burst
 Of spite so eased him! He'll inform me . . .
 What? 150

Why come I hither? All 's in rough: let all
 Remain rough. There 's full time to draw back—
 nay,
 There 'snought to draw back from, as yet; whereas,
 If reason should be, to arrest a course
 Of error—reason good, to interpose 155
 And save, as I have saved so many times,
 Our House, admonish my son's giddy youth,
 Relieve him of a weight that proves too much—
 Now is the time,—or now, or never.

'Faith,
 This kind of step is pitiful, not due 160
 To Charles, this stealing back—hither, because
 He 's from his capital! Oh Victor! Victor!
 But thus it is. The age of crafty men
 Is loathsome; youth contrives to carry off
 Dissimulation; we may intersperse 165
 Extenuating passages of strength,
 Ardour, vivacity, and wit—may turn
 E'en guile into a voluntary grace:
 But one's old age, when graces drop away
 And leave guile the pure staple of our lives— 170
 Ah, loathsome!

Not so—or why pause I? Turin
 Is mine to have, were I so minded, for
 The asking; all the army's mine—I've witnessed
 Each private fight beneath me; all the Court's

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Mine too ; and, best of all, D'Ormea 's still 175
D'Ormea and mine. There 's some grace cling-
ing yet.

Had I decided on this step, ere midnight
I 'd take the crown.

No. Just this step to rise
Exhausts me. Here am I arrived : the rest
Must be done for me. Would I could sit here 180
And let things right themselves, the masque
unmasque

Of the old King, crownless, grey hair and hot
blood,—

The young King, crowned, but calm before his
time,

They say,—the eager mistress with her taunts,—
And the sad earnest wife who motions me 185

Away—ay, there she knelt to me ! E'en yet
I can return and sleep at Chambery
A dream out.

Rather shake it off at Turin,
King Victor ! Say : to Turin—yes, or no ?
'T is this relentless noonday-lighted chamber, 190
Lighted like life but silent as the grave,
That disconcerts me. That 's the change must
strike.

No silence last year ! Some one flung doors wide
(Those two great doors which scrutinize me now)
And out I went 'mid crowds of men—men talking, 195
Men watching if my lip fell or brow knit,
Men saw me safe forth, put me on my road :
That makes the misery of this return.

Oh had a battle done it ! Had I dropped,
Haling some battle, three entire days old, 200
Hither and thither by the forehead—dropped
In Spain, in Austria, best of all, in France—
Spurned on its horns or underneath its hooves,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

When the spent monster went upon its knees
To pad and pash the prostrate wretch—I, Victor, 205
Sole to have stood up against France, beat down
By inches, brayed to pieces finally
In some vast unimaginable charge,
A flying hell of horse and foot and guns
Over me, and all 's lost, for ever lost, 210
There 's no more Victor when the world wakes up!
Then silence, as of a raw battle-field,
Throughout the world. Then after (as whole days
After, you catch at intervals faint noise
Through the stiff crust of frozen blood)—there
 creeps 215
A rumour forth, so faint, no noise at all,
That a strange old man, with face outworn for
 wounds,
Is stumbling on from frontier town to town,
Begging a pittance that may help him find
His Turin out; what scorn and laughter follow 220
The coin you fling into his cap! And last,
Some bright morn, how men crowd about the midst
O' the market-place, where takes the old king
 breath
Ere with his crutch he strike the palace-gate
Wide ope!

 To Turin, yes or no—or no? 225

Re-enter CHARLES with papers

Charles. Just as I thought! A miserable falsehood

Of hirelings discontented with their pay
And longing for enfranchisement! A few
Testy expressions of old age that thinks
To keep alive its dignity o'er slaves 230
By means that suit their natures!

[Tearing them.] Thus they shake

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

My faith in Victor !

[Turning, he discovers VICTOR.]

Victor [after a pause]. Not at Evian, Charles ?
What 's this ? Why do you run to close the doors ?
No welcome for your father ?

Charles [aside]. Not his voice !
What would I give for one imperious tone 235
Of the old sort ! That 's gone for ever.

Victor. Must
I ask once more . . .

Charles. No—I concede it, sir !
You are returned for . . . true, your health declines ;
True, Chambery 's a bleak unkindly spot ;
You 'd choose one fitter for your final lodge— 240
Veneria, or Moncagliè—ay, that 's close
And I concede it.

Victor. I received advices
Of the conclusion of the Spanish matter,
Dated from Evian Baths . . .

Charles. And you forbore
To visit me at Evian, satisfied 245
The work I had to do would fully task
The little wit I have, and that your presence
Would only disconcert me—

Victor. Charles ?

Charles. —Me, set
For ever in a foreign course to yours,
And . . .

Sir, this way of wile were good to catch, 250
But I have not the sleight of it. The truth !
Though I sink under it ! What brings you here ?

Victor. Not hope of this reception, certainly,
From one who 'd scarce assume a stranger mode
Of speech, did I return to bring about 255
Some awfulest calamity !

Charles. —You mean,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Did you require your crown again ! Oh yes,
I should speak otherwise ! But turn not that
To jesting ! Sir, the truth ! Your health declines ?
Is aught deficient in your equipage ? 260

Wisely you seek myself to make complaint,
And foil the malice of the world which laughs
At petty discontents ; but I shall care
That not a soul knows of this visit. Speak !

Victor [aside]. Here is the grateful much-pro-
fessing son 265

Prepared to worship me, for whose sole sake
I think to waive my plans of public good !
[*Aloud.*] Nay, Charles, if I did seek to take once
more

My crown, were so disposed to plague myself,
What would be warrant for this bitterness ? 270
I gave it—grant I would resume it—well ?

Charles. I should say simply—leaving out the
why

And how—you made me swear to keep that crown :
And as you then intended . . .

Victor. Fool ! What way
Could I intend or not intend ? As man, 275

With a man's will, when I say "I intend,"
I can intend up to a certain point,
No farther. I intended to preserve
The crown of Savoy and Sardinia whole :
And if events arise demonstrating 280
The way, I hoped should guard it, rather like
To lose it . . .

Charles. Keep within your sphere and mine !
It is God's province we usurp on, else.
Here, blindfold through the maze of things we walk
By a slight clue of false, true, right and wrong ; 285
All else is rambling and presumption. I
Havesworn to keep this kingdom : there's my truth.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Victor. Truth, boy, is here, within my breast ;
and in

Your recognition of it, truth is, too ;
And in the effect of all this tortuous dealing 290
With falsehood, used to carry out the truth,
—In its success, this falsehood turns, again,
Truth for the world. But you are right : these
themes

Are over-subtle. I should rather say
In such a case, frankly,—it fails, my scheme : 295
I hoped to see you bring about, yourself,
What I must bring about. I interpose
On your behalf—with my son's good in sight—
To hold what he is nearly letting go,
Confirm his title, add a grace perhaps. 300
There 's Sicily, for instance,—granted me
And taken back, some years since : till I give
That island with the rest, my work 's half done.
For his sake, therefore, as of those he rules . . .

Charles. Our sakes are one ; and that, you could
not say, 305

Because my answer would present itself
Forthwith :—a year has wrought an age's change.
This people 's not the people now, you once
Could benefit ; nor is my policy
Your policy.

Victor [*with an outburst*]. I know it ! You undo 310
All I have done—my life of toil and care !
I left you this the absolutest rule
In Europe : do you think I sit and smile,
Bid you throw power to the populace—
See my Sardinia, that has kept apart, 315
Join in the mad and democratic whirl
Whereto I see all Europe haste full tide ?
England casts off her kings ; France mimics
England :

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

This realm I hoped was safe. Yet here I talk,
When I can save it, not by force alone, 320
But bidding plagues, which follow sons like you,
Fasten upon my disobedient . . .

[*Recollecting himself.*] Surely
I could say this—if minded so—my son?

Charles. You could not. Bitterer curses than
your curse

Have I long since denounced upon myself 325
If I misused my power. In fear of these
I entered on those measures—will abide
By them : so, I should say, Count Tende . . .

Victor. No !

But no! But if, my Charles, your—more than old—
Half-foolish father urged these arguments, 330
And then confessed them futile, but said plainly
That he forgot his promise, found his strength
Fail him, had thought at savage Chambery
Too much of brilliant Turin, Rivoli here,
And Susa, and Veneria, and Superga— 335
Pined for the pleasant places he had built
When he was fortunate and young—

Charles. My father !

Victor. Stay yet!—and if he said he could not die
Deprived of baubles he had put aside,
He deemed, for ever—of the Crown that binds 340
Your brain up, whole, sound and impregnable,
Creating kingliness—the Sceptre too,
Whose mere wind, should you wave it, back
would beat

Invaders—and the golden Ball which throbs
As if you grasped the palpitating heart 345
Indeed o' the realm, to mould as choose you may !
—If I must totter up and down the streets
My sires built, where myself have introduced
And fostered laws and letters, sciences,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

The civil and the military arts ! 350
 Stay, Charles ! I see you letting me pretend
 To live my former self once more—King Victor,
 The venturous yet politic : they style me
 Again, the Father of the Prince : friends wink
 Good-humouredly at the delusion you 355
 So sedulously guard from all rough truths
 That else would break upon my dotage !—You—
 Whom now I see preventing my old shame—
 I tell not, point by cruel point, my tale—
 For is 't not in your breast my brow is hid ? 360
 Is not your hand extended ? Say you not . . .

Enter D'ORMEA, leading in POLYXENA

Polyxena [*advancing and withdrawing* CHARLES—
to VICTOR]. In this conjuncture even, he
 would say

(Though with a moistened eye and quivering lip)
 The suppliant is my father. I must save
 A great man from himself, nor see him fling 365
 His well-earned fame away : there must not follow
 Ruin so utter, a break-down of worth
 So absolute : no enemy shall learn,
 He thrust his child 'twixt danger and himself,
 And, when that child somehow stood danger
 out, 370
 Stole back with serpent wiles to ruin Charles
 —Body, that 's much,—and soul, that 's more—
 and realm,

That 's most of all ! No enemy shall say . . .

D'Ormea. Do you repent, sir ?

Victor [*resuming himself*]. D'Ormea ? This
 is well !

Worthily done, King Charles, craftily done ! 375
 Judiciously you post these, to o'erhear
 The little your importunate father thrusts

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Himself on you to say!—Ah, they 'll correct
 The amiable blind facility
 You show in answering his peevish suit. 380
 What can he need to sue for? Thanks, D'Ormea!
 You have fulfilled your office: but for you,
 The old Count might have drawn some few more
 livres

To swell his income! Had you, lady, missed
 The moment, a permission might be granted 385
 To buttress up my ruinous old pile!
 But you remember properly the list
 Of wise precautions I took when I gave
 Nearly as much away—to reap the fruits
 I should have looked for!

Charles. Thanks, sir: degrade me, 390
 So you remain yourself! Adieu!

Victor. I 'll not
 Forget it for the future, nor presume
 Next time to slight such mediators! Nay—
 Had I first moved them both to intercede,
 I might secure a chamber in Moncaglier 395
 —Who knows?

Charles. Adieu!

Victor. You bid me this adieu
 With the old spirit?

Charles. Adieu!

Victor. Charles—Charles!

Charles. Adieu!

[VICTOR goes.]

Charles. You were mistaken, Marquis, as you
 hear.

'T was for another purpose the Count came.
 The Count desires Moncaglier. Give the
 order!

D'Ormea [*leisurely*]. Your minister has lost
 your confidence, 400

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Asserting late, for his own purposes,
Count Tende would . . .

Charles [*flinging his badge back*]. Be still the
minister !

And give a loose to your insulting joy ;
It irks me more thus stifled than expressed :
Loose it !

405

D'Ormea. There 's none to loose, alas ! I see
I never am to die a martyr.

Polyxena.

Charles !

Charles. No praise, at least, Polyxena—no
praise !

KING CHARLES

PART II

D'ORMEA, *seated, folding papers he has been
examining*

This at the last effects it : now, King Charles
Or else King Victor—that 's a balance : but now, 410
D'Ormea the arch-culprit, either turn
O' the scale,—that 's sure enough. A point to
solve,

My masters, moralists, whate'er your style !
When you discover why I push myself
Into a pitfall you 'd pass safely by, 415
Impart to me among the rest ! No matter.
Prompt are the righteous ever with their rede
To us the wrongful ; lesson them this once !
For safe among the wicked are you set,
D'Ormea ! We lament life's brevity, 420
Yet quarter e'en the threescore years and ten,
Nor stick to call the quarter roundly "life."
D'Ormea was wicked, say, some twenty years ;
A tree so long was stunted ; afterward,
What if it grew, continued growing, till 425
No fellow of the forest equalled it ?
'T was a stump then ; a stump it still must be :
While forward saplings, at the outset checked,
In virtue of that first sprout keep their style
Amid the forest's green fraternity. 430
Thus I shoot up to surely get lopped down
And bound up for the burning. Now for it !

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Enter CHARLES and POLYXENA with Attendants

D'Ormea [*rises*]. Sir, in the due discharge of
this my office—

This enforced summons of yourself from Turin,
And the disclosure I am bound to make 435
To-night,—there must already be, I feel,
So much that wounds . . .

Charles. Well, sir?

D'Ormea. —That I, perchance,
May utter also what, another time,
Would irk much,—it may prove less irksome now.

Charles. What would you utter?

D'Ormea. That I from my soul 440
Grieve at to-night's event: for you I grieve,
E'en grieve for . . .

Charles. Tush, another time for talk!
My kingdom is in imminent danger?

D'Ormea. Let
The Count communicate with France—its King,
His grandson, will have Fleury's aid for this, 445
Though for no other war.

Charles. First for the levies:
What forces can I muster presently?

[*D'ORMEA delivers papers which CHARLES
inspects.*]

Charles. Good—very good. Montorio . . .
how is this?
—Equips me double the old complement
Of soldiers?

D'Ormea. Since his land has been relieved 450
From double imposts, this he manages:
But under the late monarch . . .

Charles. Peace! I know.
Count Spava has omitted mentioning
What proxy is to head these troops of his.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

D'Ormea. Count Spava means to head his troops himself.

Something to fight for now; "Whereas," says he, 455
"Under the sovereign's father" . . .

Charles. It would seem
That all my people love me.

D'Ormea. Yes.

[*To POLYXENA while CHARLES continues to inspect the papers.*

A temper

Like Victor's may avail to keep a state ;
He terrifies men and they fall not off ; 460
Good to restrain : best, if restraint were all.
But, with the silent circle round him, ends
Such sway : our King's begins precisely there.
For to suggest, impel and set at work,
Is quite another function. Men may slight, 465
In time of peace, the King who brought them
peace :

In war,—his voice, his eyes, help more than fear.
They love you, sir !

Charles [*to Attendants*]. Bring the regalia forth !
Quit the room ! And now, Marquis, answer me !
Why should the King of France invade my realm? 470

D'Ormea. Why? Did I not acquaint your
Majesty
An hour ago?

Charles. I choose to hear again
What then I heard.

D'Ormea. Because, sir, as I said,
Your father is resolved to have his crown
At any risk ; and, as I judge, calls in 475
The foreigner to aid him.

Charles. And your reason
For saying this?

D'Ormea [*aside*]. Ay, just his father's way !

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

[To CHARLES.] The Count wrote yesterday to your
forces' Chief,

Rhebinder—made demand of help—

Charles.

To try

Rhebinder—he 's of alien blood : aught else ?

480

D'Ormea. Receiving a refusal,—some hours
after,

The Count called on Del Borgo to deliver

The Act of Abdication : he refusing,

Or hesitating, rather—

Charles.

What ensued ?

D'Ormea. At midnight, only two hours since,
at Turin,

485

He rode in person to the citadel

With one attendant, to Soccorso gate,

And bade the governor, San Remi, open—

Admit him.

Charles. For a purpose I divine.

These three were faithful, then ?

D'Ormea.

They told it me. 490

And I—

Charles. Most faithful—

D'Ormea.

Tell it you—with this

Moreover of my own : if, an hour hence,

You have not interposed, the Count will be

O' the road to France for succour.

Charles.

Very good !

You do your duty now to me your monarch

495

Fully, I warrant ?—have, that is, your project

For saving both of us disgrace, no doubt ?

D'Ormea. I give my counsel,—and the only one.

A month since, I besought you to employ

Restraints which had prevented many a pang :

500

But now the harsher course must be pursued.

These papers, made for the emergency,

Will pain you to subscribe : this is a list

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Of those suspected merely—men to watch ;
This—of the few of the Count's very household 505
You must, however reluctantly, arrest ;
While here 's a method of remonstrance—sure
Not stronger than the case demands—to take
With the Count's self.

Charles. Deliver those three papers.

Polixena [*while CHARLES inspects them—to*
D'ORMEA]. Your measures are not over-
harsh, sir : France

Will hardly be deterred from her intents 510
By these.

D'Ormea. If who proposes might dispose,
I could soon satisfy you. Even these,
Hear what he 'll say at my presenting !

Charles [*who has signed them*]. There !
About the warrants ! You 've my signature. 515
What turns you pale ? I do my duty by you
In acting boldly thus on your advice.

D'Ormea [*reading them separately*]. Arrest the
people I suspected merely ?

Charles. Did you suspect them ?

D'Ormea. Doubtless : but—but—sir,
This Forquieri 's governor of Turin, 520
And Rivarol and he have influence over
Half of the capital ! Rabella, too ?
Why, sir—

Charles. Oh, leave the fear to me !

D'Ormea [*still reading*]. You bid me
Incarcerate the people on this list ?
Sir—

Charles. But you never bade arrest those men, 525
So close related to my father too,
On trifling grounds ?

D'Ormea. Oh, as for that, St. George,
President of Chambery's senators,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Is hatching treason ! still—

[*More troubled.*] Sir, Count Cumiane
Is brother to your father's wife ! What 's here ? 530
Arrest the wife herself ?

Charles. You seem to think
A venial crime this plot against me. Well ?

D'Ormea [*who has read the last paper*]. Where-
fore am I thus ruined ? Why not take
My life at once ? This poor formality
Is, let me say, unworthy you ! Prevent it 535
You, madam ! I have served you, am prepared
For all disgraces : only, let disgrace
Be plain, be proper—proper for the world
To pass its judgment on 'twixt you and me !
Take back your warrant, I will none of it ! 540

Charles. Here is a man to talk of fickleness !
He stakes his life upon my father's falsehood ;
I bid him . . .

D'Ormea. Not you ! Were he trebly false,
You do not bid me . . .

Charles. Is 't not written there ?
I thought so : give—I 'll set it right.

D'Ormea. Is it there ? 545
Oh yes, and plain—arrest him now—drag here
Your father ! And were all six times as plain,
Do you suppose I trust it ?

Charles. Just one word !
You bring him, taken in the act of flight,
Or else your life is forfeit.

D'Ormea. Ay, to Turin 550
I bring him, and to-morrow ?

Charles. Here and now !
The whole thing is a lie, a hateful lie,
As I believed and as my father said.
I knew it from the first, but was compelled
To circumvent you ; and the great D'Ormea, 555

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

That baffled Alberoni and tricked Coscia,
 The miserable sower of such discord
 'Twixt sire and son, is in the toils at last.
 Oh I see ! you arrive—this plan of yours,
 Weak as it is, torments sufficiently 560
 A sick old peevish man—wings hasty speech,
 An ill-considered threat from him ; that 's noted ;
 Then out you ferret papers, his amusement
 In lonely hours of lassitude—examine
 The day-by-day report of your paid spies— 565
 And back you come : all was not ripe, you find,
 And, as you hope, may keep from ripening yet,
 But you were in bare time ! Only, 't were best
 I never saw my father—these old men
 Are potent in excuses : and meanwhile, 570
 D'Ormea 's the man I cannot do without !

Polyxena. Charles—

Charles. Ah, no question ! You against me too !
 You 'd have me eat and drink and sleep, live, die
 With this lie coiled about me, choking me !
 No, no, D'Ormea ! You venture life, you say, 575
 Upon my father's perfidy : and I
 Have, on the whole, no right to disregard
 The chains of testimony you thus wind
 About me ; though I do—do from my soul
 Discredit them : still I must authorize 580
 These measures, and I will. Perugia !

[*Many Officers enter.*] Count—

You and Solar, with all the force you have,
 Stand at the Marquis' orders : what he bids,
 Implicitly perform ! You are to bring
 A traitor here ; the man that 's likest one 585
 At present, fronts me ; you are at his beck
 For a full hour ! he undertakes to show
 A fouler than himself,—but, failing that,
 Return with him, and, as my father lives,

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

He dies this night ! The clemency you blame 590
So oft, shall be revoked—rights exercised,
Too long abjured.

[*To D'ORMEA.*] Now sir, about the work !
To save your king and country ! Take the
warrant !

D'Ormea. You hear the sovereign's mandate,
Count Perugia ?

Obeys me ! As your diligence, expect 595
Reward ! All follow to Moncagliè !

Charles [*in great anguish*]. *D'Ormea !*
[*D'ORMEA goes.*

He goes, lit up with that appalling smile !
[*To POLYXENA, after a pause.*

At least you understand all this ?
Polyxena. These means
Of our defence—these measures of precaution ?

Charles. It must be the best way ; I should 600
have else

Withered beneath his scorn.

Polyxena. What would you say ?

Charles. Why, do you think I mean to keep
the crown,

Polyxena ?

Polyxena. You then believe the story
In spite of all—that Victor comes ?

Charles. Believe it ?

I know that he is coming—feel the strength 605
That has upheld me leave me at his coming !

'T was mine, and now he takes his own again.
Some kinds of strength are well enough to have ;
But who's to have that strength ? Let my crown go !
I meant to keep it ; but I cannot—cannot ! 610

Only, he shall not taunt me—he, the first . . .
See if he would not be the first to taunt me
With having left his kingdom at a word.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

With letting it be conquered without stroke,
With . . . no—no—'t is no worse than when he
left!

615

I've just to bid him take it, and, that over,
We'll fly away—fly, for I loathe this Turin,
This Rivoli, all titles loathe, all state.
We'd best go to your country—unless God
Send I die now!

Polyxena. Charles, hear me!

Charles. And again 620

Shall you be my Polyxena—you'll take me
Out of this woe! Yes, do speak, and keep
speaking!

I would not let you speak just now, for fear
You'd counsel me against him: but talk, now,
As we two used to talk in blessed times: 625
Bid me endure all his caprices; take me
From this mad post above him!

Polyxena. I believe

We are undone, but from a different cause.
All your resources, down to the least guard,
Are at D'Ormea's beck. What if, the while, 630
He act in concert with your father? We
Indeed were lost. This lonely Rivoli—
Where find a better place for them?

Charles [*pacing the room*]. And why

Does Victor come? To undo all that's done,
Restore the past, prevent the future! Seat 635
His mistress in your seat, and place in mine
. . . Oh, my own people, whom will you find
there,

To ask of, to consult with, to care for,
To hold up with your hands? Whom? One that's
false—

False—from the head's crown to the foot's sole,
false!

640

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

The best is, that I knew it in my heart
From the beginning, and expected this,
And hated you, Polyxena, because
You saw thro' him, though I too saw thro' him,
Saw that he meant this while he crowned me,
while
He prayed for me,—nay, while he kissed my brow,
I saw—— 645

Polyxena. But if your measures take effect,
D'Ormea true to you?

Charles. Then worst of all!
I shall have loosed that callous wretch on him!
Well may the woman taunt him with his child— 650
I, eating here his bread, clothed in his clothes,
Seated upon his seat, let slip D'Ormea
To outrage him! We talk—perchance he tears
My father from his bed; the old hands feel
For one who is not, but who should be there, 655
He finds D'Ormea! D'Ormea too finds him!
The crowded chamber when the lights go out—
Closed doors—the horrid scuffle in the dark—
The accursed prompting of the minute! My
guards!

To horse—and after, with me—and prevent! 660

Polyxena [seizing his hand]. King Charles! Pause
here upon this strip of time
Allotted you out of eternity!
Crowns are from God: you in his name hold yours.
Your life's no least thing, were it fit your life
Should be abjured along with rule; but now, 665
Keep both! Your duty is to live and rule—
You, who would vulgarly look fine enough
In the world's eye, deserting your soul's charge,—
Ay, you would have men's praise, this Rivoli
Would be illumined! While, as 't is, no doubt, 670
Something of stain will ever rest on you;

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

No one will rightly know why you refused
 To abdicate ; they 'll talk of deeds you could
 Have done, no doubt,—nor do I much expect
 Future achievement will blot out the past, 675
 Envelope it in haze—nor shall we two
 Live happy any more. 'T will be, I feel,
 Only in moments that the duty 's seen
 As palpably as now : the months, the years
 Of painful indistinctness are to come, 680
 While daily must we tread these palace-rooms
 Pregnant with memories of the past : your eye
 May turn to mine and find no comfort there,
 Through fancies that beset me, as yourself,
 Of other courses, with far other issues, 685
 We might have taken this great night : such bear,
 As I will bear ! What matters happiness ?
 Duty ! There 's man's one moment : this is
 yours !

*[Putting the crown on his head, and the
 sceptre in his hand, she places him on
 his seat : a long pause and silence.]*

Enter D'ORMEA and VICTOR, with Guards

Victor. At last I speak ; but once—that once,
 to you !

'T is you I ask, not these your varletry, 690
 Who 's King of us ?

Charles [*from his seat*]. Count Tende . . .

Victor. What your spies

Assert I ponder in my soul, I say—
 Here to your face, amid your guards ! I choose
 To take again the crown whose shadow I gave—
 For still its potency surrounds the weak 695
 White locks their felon hands have discomposed.
 Or I 'll not ask who 's King, but simply, who
 Withholds the crown I claim ? Deliver it !

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

I have no friend in the wide world : nor France
Nor England cares for me : you see the sum 700
Of what I can avail. Deliver it !

Charles. Take it, my father !

And now say in turn,
Was it done well, my father—sure not well,
To try me thus ! I might have seen much cause
For keeping it—too easily seen cause ! 705
But, from that moment, e'en more woefully
My life had pined away, than pine it will.
Already you have much to answer for.
My life to pine is nothing,—her sunk eyes
Were happy once ! No doubt, my people think 710
I am their King still . . . but I cannot strive !
Take it !

*Victor [one hand on the crown CHARLES offers, the
other on his neck].* So few years give it quietly,
My son ! It will drop from me. See you not ?
A crown 's unlike a sword to give away—
That, let a strong hand to a weak hand give ! 715
But crowns should slip from palsied brows to
heads

Young as this head : yet mine is weak enough,
E'en weaker than I knew. I seek for phrases
To vindicate my right. 'T is of a piece !
All is alike gone by with me—who beat 720
Once D'Orleans in his lines—his very lines !
To have been Eugene's comrade, Louis's rival,
And now . . .

Charles [putting the crown on him, to the rest].

The King speaks, yet none kneels, I think !

Victor. I am then King ! As I became a King
Despite the nations, kept myself a King, 725
So I die King, with Kingship dying too
Around me. I have lasted Europe's time.
What wants my story of completion ? Where

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Must needs the damning break show? Who
mistrusts

My children here—tell they of any break 730

'Twixt my day's sunrise and its fiery fall?

And who were by me when I died but they?

D'Ormea there!

Charles. What means he?

Victor. Ever there!

Charles—how to save your story! Mine must go.

Say—say that you refused the crown to me! 735

Charles, yours shall be my story! You immured

Me, say, at Rivoli. A single year

I spend without a sight of you, then die.

That will serve every purpose—tell that tale

The world!

Charles. Mistrust me? Help!

Victor. Past help, past reach! 740

'T is in the heart—you cannot reach the heart:

This broke mine, that I did believe, you, Charles,

Would have denied me and disgraced me.

Polyxena. Charles

Has never ceased to be your subject, sir!

He reigned at first through setting up yourself 745

As pattern: if he e'er seemed harsh to you,

'T was from a too intense appreciation

Of your own character: he acted you—

Ne'er for an instant did I think it real,

Nor look for any other than this end. 750

I hold him worlds the worse on that account;

But so it was.

Charles [to POLYXENA]. I love you now indeed.

[*To VICTOR.*] You never knew me.

Victor. Hardly till this moment,

When I seem learning many other things

Because the time for using them is past. 755

If 't were to do again! That's idly wished.

KING VICTOR AND KING CHARLES

Truthfulness might prove policy as good
As guile. Is this my daughter's forehead? Yes :
I 've made it fitter now to be a queen's
Than formerly : I 've ploughed the deep lines
there

Which keep too well a crown from slipping off.
No matter. Guile has made me King again.

*Louis—'t was in King Victor's time :—long since,
When Louis reigned and, also, Victor reigned.*

How the world talks already of us two !

God of eclipse and each discoloured star,
Why do I linger then ?

Ha ! Where lurks he ?

D'Ormea ! Nearer to your King ! Now stand !

[*Collecting his strength as D'ORMEA approaches.*
You lied, D'Ormea ! I do not repent. [*Dies.*

760

765

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

A TRAGEDY

PERSONS

The Grand-Master's Prefect

The Patriarch's Nuncio

The Republic's Admiral

LOYS DE DREUX, *Knight-Novice*

Initiated Druses—DJABAL, KHALIL, ANAEL, MAANI, KAR-SHOOK, RAGHIB, AYOOB, *and others*

Uninitiated Druses

Prefect's Guard. Nuncio's Attendants. Admiral's Force

TIME, 14—

PLACE.—*An Islet of the Southern Sporades, colonized by Druses of Lebanon, and garrisoned by the Knights-Hospitallers of Rhodes*

SCENE.—*A Hall in the Prefect's Palace*

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

1843

ACT I

Enter stealthily KARSHOOK, RAGHIB, AYOOB and other initiated Druses, each as he enters casting off a robe that conceals his distinctive black vest and white turban; then, as giving a loose to exultation,—

Karshook. The moon is carried off in purple fire :
Day breaks at last ! Break glory, with the day,
On Djabal's dread incarnate mystery
Now ready to resume its pristine shape
Of Hakeem, as the Khalif vanished erst
In what seemed death to uninstructed eyes,
On red Mokattam's verge—our Founder's flesh,
As he resumes our Founder's function !

5

Raghib. —Death
Sweep to the Christian Prefect that enslaved
So long us sad Druse exiles o'er the sea !

10

Ayooob. Most joy be thine, O Mother-mount !
Thy brood
Returns to thee, no outcasts as we left,
But thus—but thus ! Behind, our Prefect's corse ;
Before, a presence like the morning—thine,

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT I

Absolute Djabal late,—God Hakeem now 15
That day breaks !

Karshook. Off then, with disguise at last !
As from our forms this hateful garb we strip,
Lose every tongue its glozing accent too,
Discard each limb the ignoble gesture ! Cry,
'T is the Druse Nation, warders on our Mount 20
Of the world's secret, since the birth of time,
—No kindred slips, no offsets from thy stock,
No spawn of Christians are we, Prefect, we
Who rise . . .

Ayoob. Who shout . . .

Raghib. Who seize, a first-fruits, ha—
Spoil of the spoiler ! Brave !

[*They begin to tear down, and to dispute for,
the decorations of the hall.*]

Karshook. Hold !

Ayoob. —Mine, I say ; 25

And mine shall it continue !

Karshook. Just this fringe !
Take anything beside ! Lo, spire on spire,
Curl serpentwise wreathed columns to the top
O' the roof, and hide themselves mysteriously
Among the twinkling lights and darks that haunt 30
Yon cornice ! Where the huge veil, they suspend
Before the Prefect's chamber of delight,
Floats wide, then falls again as if its slave,
The scented air, took heart now, and anon
Lost heart to buoy its breadths of gorgeousness 35
Above the gloom they droop in—all the porch
Is jewelled o'er with frostwork character ;
And, see, yon eight-point cross of white flame,
winking

Hoar-silvery like some fresh-broke marble stone :
Raze out the Rhodian cross there, so thou leav'st me 40
This single fringe !

ACT I THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Ayoob. Ha, wouldst thou, dog-fox? Help!
—Three hand-breadths of gold fringe, my son
was set

To twist, the night he died!

Karshook. Nay, hear the knave!
And I could witness my one daughter borne,
A week since, to the Prefect's couch, yet fold 45
These arms, be mute, lest word of mine should mar
Our Master's work, delay the Prefect here
A day, prevent his sailing hence for Rhodes—
How know I else?—Hear me denied my right
By such a knave!

Raghib [interposing]. Each ravage for himself! 50
Booty enough! On, Druses! Be there found
Blood and a heap behind us; with us, Djabal
Turned Hakeem; and before us, Lebanon!
Yields the porch? Spare not! There his minions
dragged

Thy daughter, Karshook, to the Prefect's couch! 55
Ayoob! Thy son, to soothe the Prefect's pride,
Bent o'er that task, the death-sweat on his brow,
Carving the spice-tree's heart in scroll-work there!
Onward in Djabal's name!

*As the tumult is at height, enter KHALIL. A pause
and silence*

Khalil. Was it for this,
Djabal hath summoned you? Deserve you thus 60
A portion in to-day's event? What, here—
When most behoves your feet fall soft, your eyes
Sink low, your tongues lie still,—at Djabal's
side,
Close in his very hearing, who, perchance,
Assumes e'en now God Hakeem's dreaded shape,— 65
Dispute you for these gauds?

Ayoob. How say'st thou, Khalil?

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT I

Doubtless our Master prompts thee! Take the
fringe,

Old Karshook! I supposed it was a day . . .

Khalil. For pillage?

Karshook. Hearken, Khalil! Never spoke
A boy so like a song-bird; we avouch thee 70
Prettiest of all our Master's instruments
Except thy bright twin-sister; thou and Anael
Challenge his prime regard: but we may crave
(Such nothings as we be) a portion too
Of Djabal's favour; in him we believed, 75
His bound ourselves, him moon by moon obeyed,
Kept silence till this daybreak—so, may claim
Reward: who grudges me my claim?

Ayoob.

To-day

Is not as yesterday!

Raghib.

Stand off!

Khalil.

Rebel you?

Must I, the delegate of Djabal, draw 80
His wrath on you, the day of our Return?

Other Druses. Wrench from their grasp the
fringe! Hounds! must the earth
Vomit her plagues on us thro' thee?—and thee?
Plague me not, Khalil, for their fault!

Khalil.

Oh, shame!

Thus breaks to-day on you, the mystic tribe 85
Who, flying the approach of Osman, bore
Our faith, a merest spark, from Syria's ridge
Its birthplace, hither! "Let the sea divide
"These hunters from their prey," you said; "and
safe

"In this dim islet's virgin solitude 90
"Tend we our faith, the spark, till happier time
"Fan it to fire; till Hakeem rise again,
"According to his word that, in the flesh
"Which faded on Mokattam ages since,

ACT I THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

“He, at our extreme need, would interpose, 95
 “And, reinstating all in power and bliss,
 “Lead us himself to Lebanon once more.”
 Was ’t not thus you departed years ago,
 Ere I was born?

Druses. ’T was even thus, years ago.

Khalil. And did you call—(according to old laws 100
 Which bid us, lest the sacred grow profane,
 Assimilate ourselves in outward rites
 With strangers fortune makes our lords, and live
 As Christian with the Christian, Jew with Jew,
 Druse only with the Druses)—did you call 105
 Or no, to stand ’twixt you and Osman’s rage
 (Mad to pursue e’en hither thro’ the sea
 The remnant of our tribe), a race self-vowed
 To endless warfare with his hordes and him,
 The White-cross Knights of the adjacent Isle? 110

Karshook. And why else rend we down, wrench
 up, rase out?
 These Knights of Rhodes we thus solicited
 For help, bestowed on us a fiercer pest
 Than aught we fled—their Prefect; who began
 His promised mere paternal governance 115
 By a prompt massacre of all our Sheikhs
 Able to thwart the Order in its scheme
 Of crushing, with our nation’s memory,
 Each chance of our return, and taming us
 Bondslaves to Rhodes for ever—all, he thinks 120
 To end by this day’s treason.

Khalil. Say I not?
 You, fitted to the Order’s purposes,
 Your Sheikhs cut off, your rites, your garb pro-
 scribed,
 Must yet receive one degradation more;
 The Knights at last throw off the mask—transfer, 125
 As tributary now and appanage,

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT I

This islet they are but protectors of,
 To their own ever-craving liege, the Church,
 Who licenses all crimes that pay her thus.
 You, from their Prefect, were to be consigned 130
 (Pursuant of I know not what vile pact)
 To the Knights' Patriarch, ardent to outvie
 His predecessor in all wickedness.
 When suddenly rose Djabal in the midst,
 Djabal, the man in semblance, but our God 135
 Confessed by signs and portents. Ye saw fire
 Bicker round Djabal, heard strange music flit
 Bird-like about his brow?

Druses. We saw—we heard!

Djabal is Hakeem, the incarnate Dread,
 The phantasm Khalif, King of Prodigies! 140

Khalil. And as he said has not our Khalif done,
 And so disposed events (from land to land
 Passing invisibly) that when, this morn,
 The pact of villany complete, there comes
 This Patriarch's Nuncio with this Master's Prefect 145
 Their treason to consummate,—each will face
 For a crouching handful, an uplifted nation:
 For simulated Christians, confessed Druses:
 And, for slaves past hope of the Mother-mountain,
 Freedmen returning there 'neath Venice' flag; 150
 That Venice which, the Hospitallers' foe,
 Grants us from Candia escort home at price
 Of our relinquished isle, Rhodes counts her own—
 Venice, whose promised argosies should stand
 Toward harbour: is it now that you, and you, 155
 And you, selected from the rest to bear
 The burthen of the Khalif's secret, further
 To-day's event, entitled by your wrongs,
 And witness in the Prefect's hall his fate—
 That you dare clutch these gauds? Ay, drop them!

Karshook.

True, 160

ACT I THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Most true, all this ; and yet, may one dare hint,
Thou art the youngest of us ?—though employed
Abundantly as Djabal's confidant,
Transmitter of his mandates, even now.

Much less, whene'er beside him Anaël graces 165
The cedar throne, his queen-bride, art thou like
To occupy its lowest step that day !

Now, Khalil, wert thou checked as thou aspirest,
Forbidden such or such an honour,—say,
Would silence serve so amply ?

Khalil. Karshook thinks 170

I covet honours ? Well, nor idly thinks.
Honours ? I have demanded of them all
The greatest.

Karshook. I supposed so.

Khalil. Judge, yourselves !

Turn, thus : 't is in the alcove at the back
Of yonder columned porch, whose entrance now 175
The veil hides, that our Prefect holds his state,
Receives the Nuncio, when the one, from Rhodes,
The other lands from Syria ; there they meet.
Now, I have sued with earnest prayers . . .

Karshook. For what

Shall the Bride's brother vainly sue ?

Khalil. That mine— 180

Avenging in one blow a myriad wrongs
—Might be the hand to slay the Prefect there !
Djabal reserves that office for himself.

[*A silence.*

Thus far, as youngest of you all, I speak
—Scarce more enlightened than yourselves ; since,
near 185

As I approach him, nearer as I trust
Soon to approach our Master, he reveals
Only the God's power, not the glory yet.
Therefore I reasoned with you : now, as servant

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT I

To Djabal, bearing his authority, 190
 Hear me appoint your several posts ! Till noon
 None see him save myself and Anael : once
 The deed achieved, our Khalif, casting off
 The embodied Awe's tremendous mystery,
 The weakness of the flesh disguise, resumes 195
 His proper glory, ne'er to fade again.

Enter a Druse

The Druse. Our Prefect lands from Rhodes !—
 without a sign

That he suspects aught since he left our Isle ;
 Nor in his train a single guard beyond
 The few he sailed with hence : so have we learned 200
 From Loys.

Karshook. Loys ? Is not Loys gone
 For ever ?

Ayoob. Loys, the Frank Knight, returned ?

The Druse. Loys, the boy, stood on the leading
 prow

Conspicuous in his gay attire, and leapt
 Into the surf the foremost. Since day-dawn 205
 I kept watch to the Northward ; take but note
 Of my poor vigilance to Djabal !

Khalil. Peace !

Thou, Karshook, with thy company, receive
 The Prefect as appointed : see, all keep
 The wonted show of servitude : announce 210
 His entry here by the accustomed peal
 Of trumpets, then await the further pleasure
 Of Djabal ! (Loys back, whom Djabal sent
 To Rhodes that we might spare the single Knight
 Worth sparing !)

Enter a second Druse

The Druse. I espied it first ! Say, I 215

ACT I THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

First spied the Nuncio's galley from the South !
Said'st thou a Crossed-keys' flag would flap the
mast ?

It nears apace ! One galley and no more.
If Djabal chance to ask who spied the flag,
Forget not, I it was !

Khalil. Thou, Ayoob, bring 220
The Nuncio and his followers hither ! Break
One rule prescribed, ye wither in your blood,
Die at your fault !

Enter a third Druse

The Druse. I shall see home, see home !
—Shall banquet in the sombre groves again !
Hail to thee, Khalil ! Venice looms afar ; 225
The argosies of Venice, like a cloud,
Bear up from Candia in the distance !

Khalil. Joy !
Summon our people, Raghib ! Bid all forth !
Tell them the long-kept secret, old and young !
Set free the captive, let the trampled raise 230
Their faces from the dust, because at length
The cycle is complete, God Hakeem's reign
Begins anew ! Say, Venice for our guard,
Ere night we steer for Syria ! Hear you, Druses ?
Hear you this crowning witness to the claims 235
Of Djabal ? Oh, I spoke of hope and fear,
Reward and punishment, because he bade
Who has the right ; for me, what should I say
But, mar not those imperial lineaments,
No majesty of all that rapt regard 240
Vex by the least omission ! Let him rise
Without a check from you !

Druses. Let Djabal rise !

Enter LOYS.—The Druses are silent

Loys. Who speaks of Djabal?—for I seek him,
friends!

[*Aside.*] *Tu Dieu!* 'Tis as our Isle broke out in song
For joy, its Prefect-incubus drops off 245
To-day, and I succeed him in his rule!

But no—they cannot dream of their good fortune!
[*Aloud.*] Peace to you, Druses! I have tidings
for you

But first for Djabal: where's your tall bewitcher,
With that small Arab thin-lipped silver-mouth? 250

Khalil [*aside to KARSHOOK*]. Loys, in truth!
Yet Djabal cannot err!

Karshook [*to KHALIL*]. And who takes charge
of Loys? That's forgotten,
Despite thy wariness! Will Loys stand
And see his comrades slaughtered?

Loys [*aside*]. How they shrink
And whisper, with those rapid faces! What? 255

The sight of me in their oppressors' garb
Strikes terror to the simpler tribe? God's shame
On those that bring our Order ill repute!

But all's at end now; better days begin
For these mild mountaineers from over-sea: 260

The timidest shall have in me no Prefect
To cower at thus! [*Aloud.*] I asked for Djabal—

Karshook [*aside*]. Better
One lured him, ere he can suspect, inside

The corridor; 't were easy to despatch
A youngster. [*To LOYS.*] Djabal passed some
minutes since 265

Thro' yonder porch, and . . .

Khalil [*aside*]. Hold! What, him despatch?
The only Christian of them all we charge
No tyranny upon? Who,—noblest Knight

ACT I THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Of all that learned from time to time their trade
 Of lust and cruelty among us,—heir 270
 To Europe's pomp, a truest child of pride,—
 Yet stood between the Prefect and ourselves
 From the beginning? Loys, Djabal makes
 Account of, and precisely sent to Rhodes
 For safety? I take charge of him!

[To Loys.] Sir Loys,— 275
Loys. There, cousins! Does Sir Loys strike
 you dead?

Khalil [*advancing*]. Djabal has intercourse with
 few or none
 Till noontide: but, your pleasure?

Loys. “Intercourse
 “With few or none?”—(Ah, Khalil, when you spoke
 I saw not your smooth face! All health!—and health 280
 To Anael! How fares Anael?)—“Intercourse
 “With few or none?” Forget you, I've been
 friendly

With Djabal long ere you or any Druse?
 —Enough of him at Rennes, I think, beneath
 The Duke my father's roof! He'd tell by the hour, 285
 With fixed white eyes beneath his swarthy brow,
 Plausibler stories . . .

Khalil. Stories, say you?—Ah,
 The quaint attire!

Loys. My dress for the last time!
 How sad I cannot make you understand,
 This ermine, o'er a shield, betokens me 290
 Of Bretagne, ancientest of provinces
 And noblest; and, what's best and oldest there,
 See, Dreux', our house's blazon, which the Nuncio
 Tacks to an Hospitaller's vest to-day!

Khalil. The Nuncio we await? What brings
 you back 295
 From Rhodes, Sir Loys?

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT I

Loys. How you island-tribe
Forget the world 's awake while here you drowse!
What brings me back? What should not bring
me, rather!

Our Patriarch's Nuncio visits you to-day—
Is not my year's probation out? I come 300
To take the knightly vows.

Khalil. What 's that you wear?

Loys. This Rhodian cross? The cross your
Prefect wore.

You should have seen, as I saw, the full Chapter
Rise, to a man, while they transferred this cross
From that unworthy Prefect's neck to . . . (fool— 305
My secret will escape me!) In a word,
My year's probation passed, a Knight ere eve
Am I; bound, like the rest, to yield my wealth
To the common stock, to live in chastity,
(We Knights espouse alone our Order's fame) 310
—Change this gay weed for the black white-crossed
gown,

And fight to death against the Infidel
—Not, therefore, against you, you Christians with
Such partial difference only as befits
The peaceullest of tribes. But Khalil, prithee, 315
Is not the Isle brighter than wont to-day?

Khalil. Ah, the new sword!

Loys. See now! You handle sword
As 't were a camel-staff. Pull! That 's my
motto,
Annealed "*Pro fide*," on the blade in blue.

Khalil. No curve in it? Surely a blade should
curve. 320

Loys. Straight from the wrist! Loose—it should
poise itself!

Khalil [*waving with irrepressible exultation the
sword*]. We are a nation, Loys, of old fame

ACT I THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Among the mountains ! Rights have we to keep
With the sword too !

[*Remembering himself.*] But I forget—you bid me
Seek Djabal ?

Loys. What ! A sword's sight scares you not ? 325
(The People I will make of him and them !
Oh let my Prefect-sway begin at once !)

Bring Djabal—say, indeed, that come he must !

Khalil. At noon seek Djabal in the Prefect's
Chamber,

And find . . . [*Aside.*] Nay, 't is thy cursed race's
token, 330

Frank pride, no special insolence of thine !

[*Aloud.*] Tarry, and I will do your bidding, Loys !

[*To the rest aside.*] Now, forth you ! I proceed
to Djabal straight.

Leave this poor boy, who knows not what he says !

Oh will it not add joy to even thy joy, 335

Djabal, that I report all friends were true ?

[*KHALIL goes, followed by the Druses.*]

Loys. *Tu Dieu !* How happy I shall make these
Druses !

Was 't not surpassingly contrived of me
To get the long list of their wrongs by heart,
Then take the first pretence for stealing off 340

From these poor islanders, present myself
Sudden at Rhodes before the noble Chapter,

And (as best proof of ardour in its cause
Which ere to-night will have become, too, mine)

Acquaint it with this plague-sore in its body, 345
This Prefect and his villanous career ?

The princely Synod ! All I dared request

Was his dismissal ; and they graciously

Consigned his very office to myself—

Myself may cure the Isle diseased !

And well 350

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT I

For them, they did so ! Since I never felt
 How lone a lot, tho' brilliant, I embrace,
 Till now that, past retrieval, it is mine.
 To live thus, and thus die ! Yet, as I leapt
 On shore, so home a feeling greeted me 355
 That I could half believe in Djabal's story,
 He used to tempt my father with, at Rennes—
 And me, too, since the story brought me here—
 Of some Count Dreux and ancestor of ours
 Who, sick of wandering from Bouillon's war, 360
 Left his old name in Lebanon.

Long days

At least to spend in the Isle ! and, my news known
 An hour hence, what if Anael turn on me
 The great black eyes I must forget ?

Why, fool,

Recall them, then ? My business is with Djabal, 365
 Not Anael ! Djabal tarries : if I seek him ?—
 The Isle is brighter than its wont to-day.

ACT II

Enter DJABAL

Djabal. That a strong man should think himself
a God!

I—Hakeem? To have wandered through the world,
Sown falsehood, and thence reaped now scorn,
now faith,

For my one chant with many a change, my tale
Of outrage, and my prayer for vengeance—this 5
Required, forsooth, no mere man's faculty,
Noughtless than Hakeem's? The persuading Loys
To pass probation here; the getting access
By Loys to the Prefect; worst of all,
The gaining my tribe's confidence by fraud 10
That would disgrace the very Frank,—a few
Of Europe's secrets which subdue the flame,
The wave,—to ply a simple tribe with these,
Took Hakeem?

And I feel this first to-day!
Does the day break, is the hour imminent 15
When one deed, when my whole life's deed, my
deed

Must be accomplished? Hakeem? Why the God?
Shout, rather, "Djabal, Youssof's child, thought
slain

"With his whole race, the Druses' Sheikhs, this
Prefect

"Endeavoured to extirpate—saved, a child, 20
"Returns from traversing the world, a man,
"Able to take revenge, lead back the march

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT II

"To Lebanon"—so shout, and who gainsays?
 But now, because delusion mixed itself
 Insensibly with this career, all 's changed ! 25
 Have I brought Venice to afford us convoy?
 "True—but my jugglings wrought that!" Put
 I heart

Into our people where no heart lurked?—"Ah,
 "What cannot an impostor do!"

Not this!

Not do this which I do! Not bid avaunt 30
 Falsehood! Thou shalt not keep thy hold on me!
 —Nor even get a hold on me! 'T is now—
 This day—hour—minute—'t is as here I stand
 On the accursed threshold of the Prefect,
 That I am found deceiving and deceived! 35

And now what do I?—hasten to the few
 Deceived, ere they deceive the many—shout,
 "As I professed, I did believe myself!

"Say, Druses, had you seen a butchery—
 "If Ayooob, Karshook saw—Maani there 40

"Must tell you how I saw my father sink;
 "My mother's arms twine still about my neck;
 "I hear my brother shriek, here 's yet the scar
 "Of what was meant for my own death-blow—say,
 "If you had woke like me, grown year by year 45

"Out of the tumult in a far-off clime,
 "Would it be wondrous such delusion grew?
 "I walked the world, asked help at every hand;
 "Came help or no? Not this and this? Which
 helps

"When I returned with, found the Prefect here, 50
 "The Druses here, all here but Hakeem's self,
 "The Khalif of the thousand prophecies,
 "Reserved for such a juncture,—could I call
 "My mission aught but Hakeem's? Promised
 Hakeem

ACT II THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

"More than performs the Djabal—you absolve? 55

"—Me, you will never shame before the crowd

"Yet happily ignorant?—Me, both throngs surround,

"The few deceived, the many unabused,

"—Who, thus surrounded, slay for you and them

"The Prefect, lead to Lebanon? No Khalif, 60

"But Sheikh once more! Mere Djabal—not" . . .

Enter KHALIL hastily

Khalil.

—God Hakeem!

'T is told! The whole Druse nation knows thee,
Hakeem,

As we! and mothers lift on high their babes
Who seem aware, so glisten their great eyes,
Thou hast not failed us; ancient brows are proud; 65
Our elders could not earlier die, it seems,
Than at thy coming! The Druse heart is thine!
Take it! my lord and theirs, be thou adored!

Djabal [aside]. Adored!—but I renounce it
utterly!

Khalil. Already are they instituting choirs 70
And dances to the Khalif, as of old
'T is chronicled thou bad'st them.

Djabal [aside]. I abjure it!

'T is not mine—not for me!

Khalil.

Why pour they wine

Flavoured like honey and bruised mountain-herbs,
Or wear those strings of sun-dried cedar-fruit? 75

Oh, let me tell thee—Esaad, we supposed

Doting, is carried forth, eager to see

The last sun rise on the Isle: he can see now!

The shamed Druse women never wept before:

They can look up when we reach home, they say. 80
Smell!—sweet cane, saved in Lilith's breast thus
long—

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT II

Sweet!—it grows wild in Lebanon. And I
 Alone do nothing for thee! 'T is my office
 Just to announce what well thou know'st—but thus
 Thou bidst me. At this self-same moment tend 85
 The Prefect, Nuncio and the Admiral
 Hither by their three sea-paths: nor forget
 Who were the trusty watchers!—thou forget?
 Like me, who do forget that Anael bade . . .

Djabal [aside]. Ay, Anael, Anael—is that said
 at last? 90

Louder than all, that would be said, I knew!
 What does abjuring mean, confessing mean,
 To the people? Till that woman crossed my path,
 On went I, solely for my people's sake:
 I saw her, and I then first saw myself, 95
 And slackened pace: "if I should prove indeed
 "Hakeem—with Anael by!"

Khalil [aside]. Ah, he is rapt!
 Dare I at such a moment break on him
 Even to do my sister's bidding? Yes:
 The eyes are Djabal's and not Hakeem's yet, 100
 Though but till I have spoken this, perchance.

Djabal [aside]. To yearn to tell her, and yet have
 no one

Great heart's word that will tell her! I could gasp
 Doubtless one such word out, and die.

[*Aloud.*] You said
 That Anael . . .

Khalil. . . . Fain would see thee, speak
 with thee, 105
 Before thou change, discard this Djabal's shape
 She knows, for Hakeem's shape she is to know.
 Something to say that will not from her mind!
 I know not what—"Let him but come!" she said.

Djabal [half-apart]. My nation—all my Druses
 —how fare they? 110

ACT II THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Those I must save, and suffer thus to save,
Hold they their posts? Wait they their Khalif
too?

Khalil. All at the signal pant to flock around
That banner of a brow!

Djabal [*aside*]. And when they flock,
Confess them this: and after, for reward, 115
Be chased with howlings to her feet perchance!
—Have the poor outraged Druses, deaf and blind,
Precede me there, forestall my story there,
Tell it in mocks and jeers!

I lose myself.
Who needs a Hakeem to direct him now? 120
I need the veriest child—why not this child?

[*Turning abruptly to KHALIL.*
You are a Druse too, Khalil; you were nourished
Like Anael with our mysteries: if she
Could vow, so nourished, to love only one
Who should avenge the Druses, whence proceeds 125
Your silence? Wherefore made you no essay,
Who thus implicitly can execute
My bidding? What have I done, you could not?
Who, knowing more than Anael the prostration
Of our once lofty tribe, the daily life 130
Of this detested . . .

Does he come, you say,
This Prefect? All 's in readiness?

Khalil. The sword,
The sacred robe, the Khalif's mystic tiar,
Laid up so long, are all disposed beside
The Prefect's chamber.

Djabal. —Why did you despair? 135

Khalil. I know our nation's state? Too surely
know,
As thou who speak'st to prove me! Wrongs like
ours

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT II

Should wake revenge : but when I sought the
wronged

And spoke,—“The Prefect stabbed your son—
arise !

“Your daughter, while you starve, eats shame-
less bread

140

“In his pavilion—then arise !”—my speech

Fell idly : ’t was, “Be silent, or worse fare !

“Endure till time’s slow cycle prove complete !

“Who mayst thou be that takest on thee to thrust

“Into this peril—art thou Hakeem ?” No !

145

Only a mission like thy mission renders

All these obedient at a breath, subdues

Their private passions, brings their wills to
one.

Djabal. You think so ?

Khalil. Even now—when they have witnessed
Thy miracles—had I not threatened all

150

With Hakeem’s vengeance, they would mar the
work,

And couch ere this, each with his special prize,

Safe in his dwelling, leaving our main hope

To perish. No ! When these have kissed thy
feet

At Lebanon, the past purged off, the present

155

Clear,—for the future, even Hakeem’s mission

May end, and I perchance, or any youth,

Shall rule them thus renewed.—I tutor thee !

Djabal. And wisely. (He is Anael’s brother,
pure

As Anael’s self.) Go say, I come to her.

160

Haste ! I will follow you. [KHALIL goes.

Oh, not confess

To these, the blinded multitude—confess,

Before at least the fortune of my deed

Half-authorize its means ! Only to her

ACT II THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Let me confess my fault, who in my path 165
 Curled up like incense from a Mage-king's tomb
 When he would have the wayfarer descend
 Through the earth's rift and bear hid treasure
 forth !

How should child's-carelessness prove manhood's
 crime

Till now that I, whose lone youth hurried past, 170
 Letting each joy 'scape for the Druses' sake,
 At length recover in one Druse all joy ?
 Were her brow brighter, her eyes richer, still
 Would I confess. On the gulf's verge I pause.
 How could I slay the Prefect, thus and thus ? 175
 Anael, be mine to guard me, not destroy ! [*Goes.*]

*Enter ANAEL, and MAANI, who is assisting to array
 her in the ancient dress of the Druses*

Anael. Those saffron vestures of the tabret-
 girls !

Comes Djabal, think you ?

Maani. Doubtless Djabal comes.

Anael. Dost thou snow-swathe thee kinglier,
 Lebanon,

Than in my dreams ?—Nay all the tresses off 180
 My forehead ! Look I lovely so ? He says
 That I am lovely.

Maani. Lovely : nay, that hangs
 Awry.

Anael. You tell me how a khandjar hangs ?
 The sharp side, thus, along the heart, see, marks
 The maiden of our class. Are you content 185
 For Djabal as for me ?

Maani. Content, my child.

Anael. Oh mother, tell me more of him ! He
 comes

Even now—tell more, fill up my soul with him !

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT II

Maani. And did I not . . . yes, surely . . .
tell you all?

Anael. What will be changed in Djabal when
the Change

Arrives? Which feature? Not his eyes!

190

Maani. 'T is writ
Our Hakeem's eyes rolled fire and clove the dark
Superbly.

Anael. Not his eyes! His voice perhaps?
Yet that's no change; for a grave current lived
—Grandly beneath the surface ever lived,
That, scattering, broke as in live silver spray
While . . . ah, the bliss . . . he would discourse
to me

195

In that enforced still fashion, word on word!
'T is the old current which must swell thro'
that,

For what least tone, Maani, could I lose?

200

'T is surely not his voice will change!

—If Hakeem

Only stood by! If Djabal, somehow, passed
Out of the radiance as from out a robe;
Possessed, but was not it!

He lived with you?

Well—and that morning Djabal saw me first
And heard me vow never to wed but one
Who saved my People—on that day . . . proceed!

205

Maani. Once more, then: from the time of his
return

In secret, changed so since he left the Isle
That I, who screened our Emir's last of sons,
This Djabal, from the Prefect's massacre
—Who bade him ne'er forget the child he was,
—Who dreamed so long the youth he might be-
come—

210

I knew not in the man that child; the man

ACT II THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Who spoke alone of hope to save our tribe, 215
 How he had gone from land to land to save
 Our tribe—allies were sure, nor foes to dread.
 And much he mused, days, nights, alone he mused :
 But never till that day when, pale and worn
 As by a persevering woe, he cried 220
 “Is there not one Druse left me?”—and I showed
 The way to Khalil’s and your hiding-place
 From the abhorred eye of the Prefect here,
 So that he saw you, heard you speak—till then,
 Never did he announce—(how the moon seemed 225
 To ope and shut, the while, above us both !)
 —His mission was the mission promised us ;
 The cycle had revolved ; all things renewing,
 He was lost Hakeem clothed in flesh to lead
 His children home anon, now veiled to work 230
 Great purposes : the Druses now would change !

Anael. And they have changed! And obstacles
 did sink,

And furtherances rose ! And round his form
 Played fire, and music beat her angel wings !
 My people, let me more rejoice, oh more 235
 For you than for myself ! Did I but watch
 Afar the pageant, feel our Khalif pass,
 One of the throng, how proud were I—tho’ ne’er
 Singled by Djabal’s glance ! But to be chosen
 His own from all, the most his own of all, 240
 To be exalted with him, side by side,
 Lead the exulting Druses, meet . . . ah, how
 Worthily meet the maidens who await
 Ever beneath the cedars—how deserve
 This honour, in their eyes ? So bright are they 245
 Who saffron-vested sound the tabret there,
 The girls who throng there in my dream ! One
 hour

And all is over : how shall I do aught

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT II

That may deserve next hour's exalting?—How?—

[*Suddenly to MAANI.*

Mother, I am not worthy him! I read it 250

Still in his eyes! He stands as if to tell me

I am not, yet forbears. Why else revert

To one theme ever?—how mere human gifts

Suffice him in myself—whose worship fades,

Whose awe goes ever off at his approach, 255

As now, who when he comes . . .

[*DJABAL enters.*] Oh why is it

I cannot kneel to you?

Djabal. Rather, 't is I

Should kneel to you, my Anael!

Anael. Even so!

For never seem you—shall I speak the truth?—

Never a God to me! 'T is the Man's hand, 260

Eye, voice! Oh do you veil these to our people,

Or but to me? To them, I think, to them!

And brightness is their veil, shadow—my truth!

You mean that I should never kneel to you

—So, thus I kneel!

Djabal [*preventing her*]. No—no!

[*Feeling the khandjar as he raises her.*

Ha, have you chosen . . . 265

Anael. The khandjar with our ancient garb.

But, Djabal,

Change not, be not exalted yet! Give time

That I may plan more, perfect more! My blood

Beats, beats!

[*Aside.*] Oh must I then—since Loys leaves us

Never to come again, renew in me

270

These doubts so near effaced already—must

I needs confess them now to Djabal?—own

That when I saw that stranger, heard his voice,

My faith fell, and the woeful thought flashed first

That each effect of Djabal's presence, taken

275

ACT II THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

For proof of more than human attributes
 In him, by me whose heart at his approach
 Beat fast, whose brain while he was byswam round,
 Whose soul at his departure died away,
 —That every such effect might have been wrought 280
 In other frames, tho' not in mine, by Loys
 Or any merely mortal presence? Doubt
 Is fading fast ; shall I reveal it now?
 How shall I meet the rapture presently,
 With doubt unexpiated, undisclosed? 285

Djabal [aside]. Avow the truth? I cannot! In
 what words

Avow that all she loved in me was false?
 —Which yet has served that flower-like love of hers
 To climb by, like the clinging gourd, and clasp
 With its divinest wealth of leaf and bloom. 290
 Could I take down the prop-work, in itself
 So vile, yet interlaced and overlaid
 With painted cups and fruitage—might these still
 Bask in the sun, unconscious their own strength
 Of matted stalk and tendril had replaced 295
 The old support thus silently withdrawn!
 But no; the beauteous fabric crushes too.
 'T is not for my sake but for Anael's sake
 I leave her soul this Hakeem where it leans.
 Oh could I vanish from her, quit the Isle! 300
 And yet—a thought comes: here my work is done
 At every point; the Druses must return—
 Have convoy to their birth-place back, whoever
 The leader be, myself or any Druse—
 Venice is pledged to that: 't is for myself, 305
 For my own vengeance in the Prefect's death,
 I stay now, not for them: to slay or spare
 The Prefect, whom imports it save myself?
 He cannot bar their passage from the Isle;
 What would his death be but my own reward? 310

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT II

Then, mine I will forego. It is foregone !
 Let him escape with all my House's blood !
 Ere he can reach land, Djabal disappears,
 And Hakeem, Anael loved, shall, fresh as first,
 Live in her memory, keeping her sublime 315
 Above the world. She cannot touch that world
 By ever knowing what I truly am,
 Since Loys,—of mankind the only one
 Able to link my present with my past,
 My life in Europe with my Island life, 320
 Thence, able to unmask me,—I 've disposed
 Safely at last at Rhodes, and . . .

Enter KHALIL

Khalil. Loys greets thee !

Djabal. Loys? To drag me back? It cannot
 be !

Anael [*aside*]. Loys! Ah, doubt may not be
 stifled so !

Khalil. Can I have erred that thou so gazest?
 Yes, 325

I told thee not in the glad press of tidings
 Of higher import, Loys is returned
 Before the Prefect, with, if possible,
 Twice the light-heartedness of old. As though
 On some inauguration he expects, 330
 To-day, the world's fate hung !

Djabal. —And asks for me ?

Khalil. Thou knowest all things. Thee in chief
 he greets,

But every Druse of us is to be happy
 At his arrival, he declares : were Loys
 Thou, Master, he could have no wider soul 335
 To take us in with. How I love that Loys !

Djabal [*aside*]. Shame winds me with her tether
 round and round.

ACT II THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Anael [*aside*]. Loys? I take the trial! it is meet,
 The little I can do, be done; that faith,
 All I can offer, want no perfecting 340
 Which my own act may compass. Ay, this way
 All may go well, nor that ignoble doubt
 Be chased by other aid than mine. Advance
 Close to my fear, weigh Loys with my Lord,
 The mortal with the more than mortal gifts! 345

Djabal [*aside*]. Before, there were so few de-
 ceived! and now
 There's doubtless not one least Druse in the Isle
 But, having learned my superhuman claims,
 And calling me his Khalif-God, will clash
 The whole truth out from Loys at first word! 350
 While Loys, for his part, will hold me up,
 With a Frank's unimaginable scorn
 Of such imposture, to my people's eyes!
 Could I but keep him longer yet awhile
 From them, amuse him here until I plan 355
 How he and I at once may leave the Isle!
 Khalil I cannot part with from my side—
 My only help in this emergency :
 There's *Anael*!

Anael. Please you?

Djabal. *Anael*—none but she!
 [*To ANAEL.*] I pass some minutes in the chamber
 there, 360
 Ere I see Loys: you shall speak with him
 Until I join you. Khalil follows me.

Anael [*aside*]. As I divined: he bids me save
 myself,
 Offers me a probation—I accept.
 Let me see Loys!

Loys [*without*]. *Djabal*!

Anael [*aside*]. 'T is his voice. 365
 The smooth Frank trifler with our people's wrongs,

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT II

The self-complacent boy-inquirer, loud
On this and that inflicted tyranny,
—Aught serving to parade an ignorance
Of how wrong feels, inflicted ! Let me close
With what I viewed at distance : let myself
Probe this delusion to the core !

370

Djabal.

He comes.

Khalil, along with me ! while Anael waits
Till I return once more—and but once more.

ACT III

ANAEI and LOYS

Anael. Here leave me ! Here I wait another.

'T was

For no mad protestation of a love

Like this you say possesses you, I came.

Loys. Love ? how protest a love I dare not feel ?
Mad words may doubtless have escaped me : you 5
Are here—I only feel you here !

Anael. No more !

Loys. But once again, whom could you love ?

I dare,

Alas, say nothing of myself, who am

A Knight now, for when Knighthood we embrace,
Love we abjure : so, speak on safely : speak, 10

Lest I speak, and betray my faith ! And yet
To say your breathing passes through me, changes
My blood to spirit, and my spirit to you,
As Heaven the sacrificer's wine to it—

This is not to protest my love ! You said 15
You could love one . . .

Anael. One only ! We are bent
To earth—who raises up my tribe, I love ;
The Prefect bows us—who removes him ; we
Have ancient rights—who gives them back to us,
I love. Forbear me ! Let my hand go !

Loys. Him 20
You could love only ? Where is Djabal ? Stay !

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT III

[*Aside.*] Yet wherefore stay? Who does this but myself?

Had I apprised her that I come to do
Just this, what more could she acknowledge? No,
She sees into my heart's core! What is it 25
Feeds either cheek with red, as June some rose?
Why turns she from me? Ah fool, over-fond
To dream I could call up . . .

. . . What never dream
Yet feigned! 'T is love! Oh Anael, speak to me!
Djabal—

Anael. Seek Djabal by the Prefect's chamber 30
At noon! [*She paces the room.*]

Loys [*aside*]. And am I not the Prefect now?
Is it my fate to be the only one
Able to win her love, the only one
Unable to accept her love? The past
Breaks up beneath my footing: came I here 35
This morn as to a slave, to set her free
And take her thanks, and then spend day by day
Content beside her in the Isle? What works
This knowledge in me now? Her eye has broken
The faint disguise away: for Anael's sake 40
I left the Isle, for her espoused the cause
Of the Druses, all for her I thought, till now,
To live without!

—As I must live! To-day
Ordains me Knight, forbids me . . . never shall
Forbid me to profess myself, heart, arm, 45
Thy soldier!

Anael. Djabal you demanded, comes.

Loys [*aside*]. What wouldst thou, Loys? See
him? Nought beside
Is wanting: I have felt his voice a spell
From first to last. He brought me here, made
known

ACT III THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

The Druses to me, drove me hence to seek 50
 Redress for them ; and shall I meet him now,
 When nought is wanting but a word of his,
 To—what ?—induce me to spurn hope, faith, pride,
 Honour away,—to cast my lot among
 His tribe, become a proverb in men's mouths, 55
 Breaking my high pact of companionship
 With those who graciously bestowed on me
 The very opportunities I turn
 Against them ! Let me not see Djabal now !

Anael. The Prefect also comes.

Loys [*aside*]. Him let me see, 60
 Not Djabal ! Him, degraded at a word,
 To soothe me,—to attest belief in me—
 And after, Djabal ! Yes, ere I return
 To her, the Nuncio's vow shall have destroyed
 This heart's rebellion, and coerced this will 65
 For ever.

Anael, not before the vows
 Irrevocably fix me . . .

Let me fly !

The Prefect, or I lose myself for ever ! [*Goes.*]

Anael. Yes, I am calm now ; just one way
 remains—

One, to attest my faith in him : for, see, 70
 I were quite lost else : Loys, Djabal, stand
 On either side—two men ! I balance looks
 And words, give Djabal a man's preference,
 No more. In Djabal, Hakeem is absorbed !
 And for a love like this, the God who saves 75
 My race, selects me for his bride ? One way !

Enter DJABAL

Djabal [*to himself*]. No moment is to waste then ;
 't is resolved.

If Khalil may be trusted to lead back

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT III

My Druses, and if Loys can be lured
 Out of the Isle—if I procure his silence, 80
 Or promise never to return at least,—
 All 's over. Even now my bark awaits :
 I reach the next wild islet and the next,
 And lose myself beneath the sun for ever.
 And now, to Anael !

Anael. Djabal, I am thine ! 85

Djabal. Mine ? Djabal's ?—As if Hakeem had
 not been ?

Anael. Not Djabal's ? Say first, do you read
 my thought ?

Why need I speak, if you can read my thought ?

Djabal. I do not, I have said a thousand times.

Anael. (My secret 's safe, I shall surprise him
 yet !) 90

Djabal, I knew your secret from the first :

Djabal, when first I saw you . . . (by our porch
 You leant, and pressed the tinkling veil away,
 And one fringe fell behind your neck—I see !)

. . . I knew you were not human, for I said 95

“ This dim secluded house where the sea beats

“ Is heaven to me—my people's huts are hell

“ To them ; this august form will follow me,

“ Mix with the waves his voice will,—I have
 him ;

“ And they, the Prefect ! Oh, my happiness 100

“ Rounds to the full whether I choose or no !

“ His eyes met mine, he was about to speak,

“ His hand grew damp—surely he meant to say

“ He let me love him : in that moment's bliss

“ I shall forget my people pine for home— 105

“ They pass and they repass with pallid eyes ! ”

I vowed at once a certain vow ; this vow—

Not to embrace you till my tribe was saved.

Embrace me !

ACT III THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Djabal [*apart*]. And she loved me! Nought remained
 But that! Nay, Anael, is the Prefect dead? 110
Anael. Ah, you reproach me! True, his death
 crowns all,
 I know—or should know: and I would do much,
 Believe! but, death! Oh, you, who have known
 death,
 Would never doom the Prefect, were death fearful
 As we report!

Death!—a fire curls within us 115
 From the foot's palm, and fills up to the brain,
 Up, out, then shatters the whole bubble-shell
 Of flesh, perchance!

Death!—witness, I would die,
 Whate'er death be, would venture now to die
 For Khalil, for Maani—what for thee? 120
 Nay but embrace me, *Djabal*, in assurance
 My vow will not be broken, for I must
 Do something to attest my faith in you,
 Be worthy you!

Djabal [*avoiding her*]. I come for that—to say
 Such an occasion is at hand: 't is like 125
 I leave you—that we part, my Anael,—part
 For ever!

Anael. We part? Just so! I have succumbed,—
 I am, he thinks, unworthy—and nought less
 Will serve than such approval of my faith.
 Then, we part not! Remains there no way short 130
 Of that? Oh not that!

Death!—yet a hurt bird
 Died in my hands; its eyes filmed—"Nay, it
 sleeps,"

I said, "will wake to-morrow well": 't was dead.

Djabal. I stand here and time fleets. Anael—I
 come

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT III

To bid a last farewell to you : perhaps
We never meet again. But, ere the Prefect
Arrive . . . 135

Enter KHALIL, breathlessly

Khalil. He 's here! The Prefect! Twenty guards,
No more : no sign he dreams of danger. All
Awaits thee only. Ayoob, Karshook, keep
Their posts—wait but the deed's accomplishment 140
To join us with thy Druses to a man.
Still holds his course the Nuncio—near and near
The fleet from Candia steering.

Djabal [aside]. All is lost !
—Or won ?

Khalil. And I have laid the sacred robe,
The sword, the head-tiar, at the porch—the place 145
Commanded. Thou wilt hear the Prefect's trumpet.

Djabal. Then I keep Anael,—him then, past
recall,
I slay—'t is forced on me. As I began
I must conclude—so be it !

Khalil. For the rest,
Save Loys, our foe's solitary sword, 150
All is so safe that . . . I will ne'er entreat
Thy post again of thee : tho' danger none,
There must be glory only meet for thee
In slaying the Prefect.

Anael [aside]. And 't is now that Djabal
Would leave me !—in the glory meet for him ! 155

Djabal. As glory, I would yield the deed to you
Or any Druse ; what peril there may be,
I keep. [*Aside.*] All things conspire to hound
me on.

Not now, my soul, draw back, at least ! Not now !
The course is plain, howe'er obscure all else. 160
Once offer this tremendous sacrifice,

ACT III THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Prevent what else will be irreparable,
Secure these transcendental helps, regain
The Cedars—then let all dark clear itself!
I slay him!

Khalil. Anael, and no part for us! 165
[*To DJABAL.*] Hast thou possessed her with . . .

Djabal [*to ANAEL*]. Whom speak you to?
What is it you behold there? Nay, this smile
Turns stranger. Shudder you? The man must die,
As thousands of our race have died thro' him.
One blow, and I discharge his weary soul 170
From the flesh that pollutes it! Let him fill
Straight some new expiatory form, of earth
Or sea, the reptile or some aëry thing:
What is there in his death?

Anael. My brother said,
Is there no part in it for us?

Djabal. For Khalil,— 175
The trumpet will announce the Nuncio's entry;
Here, I shall find the Prefect hastening
In the Pavilion to receive him—here
I slay the Prefect; meanwhile Ayoob leads
The Nuncio with his guards within: once these 180
Secured in the outer hall, bid Ayoob bar
Entry or egress till I give the sign
Which waits the landing of the argosies
You will announce to me: this double sign
That justice is performed and help arrived, 185
When Ayoob shall receive, but not before,
Let him throw ope the palace doors, admit
The Druses to behold their tyrant, ere
We leave for ever this detested spot.

Go, Khalil, hurry all! No pause, no pause! 190
Whirl on the dream, secure to wake anon!

Khalil. What sign? and who the bearer?

Djabal. Who shall show

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT III

My ring, admit to Ayoob. How she stands !
 Have I not . . . I must have some task for her.
 Anael, not that way ! 'T is the Prefect's chamber ! 195
 Anael, keep you the ring—give you the sign !
 (It holds her safe amid the stir.) You will
 Be faithful ?

Anael [*taking the ring*]. I would fain be worthy.

Hark ! [*Trumpet without*.]

Khalil. He comes.

Djabal. And I too come.

Anael. One word, but one !

Say, shall you be exalted at the deed ? 200

Then ? On the instant ?

Djabal. I exalted ? What ?

He, there—we, thus—our wrongs revenged, our
 tribe

Set free ? Oh, then shall I, assure yourself,

Shall you, shall each of us, be in his death

Exalted !

Khalil. He is here.

Djabal. Away—away ! [*They go*. 205]

Enter the PREFECT with Guards, and LOYS

The Prefect [*to Guards*]. Back, I say, to the
 galley every guard !

That's my sole care now ; see each bench retains

Its complement of rowers ; I embark

O' the instant, since this Knight will have it so.

Alas me ! Could you have the heart, my Loys ! 210

[*To a Guard who whispers*.] Oh, bring the holy

Nuncio here forthwith ! [*The Guards go*.]

Loys, a rueful sight, confess, to see

The grey discarded Prefect leave his post,

With tears i' the eye ! So, you are Prefect
 now ?

You depose me—you succeed me ? Ha, ha ! 215

ACT III THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Loys. And dare you laugh, whom laughter less
becomes

Than yesterday's forced meekness we beheld . . .

Prefect. —When you so eloquently pleaded,
Loys,

For my dismissal from the post? Ah, meek
With cause enough, consult the Nuncio else! 220

And wish him the like meekness: for so staunch
A servant of the Church can scarce have bought
His share in the Isle, and paid for it, hard pieces!
You've my successor to condole with, Nuncio!
I shall be safe by then i' the galley, *Loys!* 225

Loys. You make as you would tell me you rejoice
To leave your scene of . . .

Prefect. Trade in the dear Druses?
Blood and sweat traffic? Spare what yesterday
We heard enough of! Drove I in the Isle
A profitable game? Learn wit, my son, 230
Which you'll need shortly! Did it never breed
Suspicion in you, all was not pure profit,
When I, the insatiate . . . and so forth—was bent
On having a partaker in my rule?
Why did I yield this Nuncio half the gain, 235
If not that I might also shift—what on him?
Half of the peril, *Loys!*

Loys. Peril?

Prefect. Hark you!
I'd love you if you'd let me—this for reason,
You save my life at price of . . . well, say risk
At least, of yours. I came a long time since 240
To the Isle; our Hospitallers bade me tame
These savage wizards, and reward myself—

Loys. The Knights who so repudiate your crime?

Prefect. *Loys,* the Knights! we doubtless under-
stood

Each other; as for trusting to reward 245

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT III

From any friend beside myself . . . no, no !
 I clutched mine on the spot, when it was sweet,
 And I had taste for it. I felt these wizards
 Alive—was sure they were not on me, only
 When I was on them: but with age comes caution: 250
 And stinging pleasures please less and sting more.
 Year by year, fear by fear! The girls were brighter
 Than ever ('faith, there 's yet one Anael left,
 I set my heart upon—Oh, prithee, let
 That brave new sword lie still!)—These joys
 looked brighter, 255

But silenter the town, too, as I passed.
 With this alcove's delicious memories
 Began to mingle visions of gaunt fathers,
 Quick-eyed sons, fugitives from the mine, the oar,
 Stealing to catch me. Brief, when I began 260
 To quake with fear—(I think I hear the Chapter
 Solicited to let me leave, now all
 Worth staying for was gained and gone!)—I say,
 Just when, for the remainder of my life,
 All methods of escape seemed lost—that then 265
 Up should a young hot-headed Loys spring,
 Talk very long and loud,—in fine, compel
 The Knights to break their whole arrangement,
 have me

Home for pure shame—from this safehold of mine
 Where but ten thousand Druses seek my life, 270
 To my wild place of banishment, San Gines
 By Murcia, where my three fat manors lying,
 Purchased by gains here and the Nuncio's gold,
 Are all I have to guard me,—that such fortune
 Should fall to me, I hardly could expect. 275
 Therefore I say, I 'd love you.

Loys. Can it be?
 I play into your hands then? Oh no, no!
 The Venerable Chapter, the Great Order

ACT III THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Sunk o' the sudden into fiends of the pit ?
But I will back—will yet unveil you !

Prefect. Me ? 280

To whom ?—perhaps Sir Galeas, who in Chapter
Shook his white head thrice—and some dozen times
My hand next morning shook, for value paid !
To that Italian saint, Sir Cosimo ?—

Indignant at my wringing year by year 285

A thousand bezants from the coral-divers,
As you recounted ; felt the saint aggrieved ?
Well might he—I allowed for his half-share
Merely one hundred. To Sir . . .

Loys. See ! you dare 290
Inculcate the whole Order ; yet should I,
A youth, a sole voice, have the power to change
Their evil way, had they been firm in it ?
Answer me !

Prefect. Oh, the son of Bretagne's Duke,
And that son's wealth, the father's influence, too,
And the young arm, we 'll even say, my Loys, 295
—The fear of losing or diverting these
Into another channel, by gainsaying
A novice too abruptly, could not influence
The Order ! You might join, for aught they cared,
Their red-cross rivals of the Temple ! Well, 300
I thank you for my part, at all events.

Stay here till they withdraw you ! You 'll inhabit
My palace—sleep, perchance, in the alcove
Whither I go to meet our holy friend.
Good ! and now disbelieve me if you can,— 305
This is the first time for long years I enter
Thus [*lifts the arras*] without feeling just as if I
lifted

The lid up of my tomb.

Loys. They share his crime !
God's punishment will overtake you yet.

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT III

Prefect. Thank you it does not ! Pardon this
last flash :

310

I bear a sober visage presently
With the disinterested Nuncio here—
His purchase-money safe at Murcia, too !
Let me repeat—for the first time, no draught
Coming as from a sepulchre salutes me. 315
When we next meet, this folly may have passed,
We 'll hope. Ha, ha ! [*Goes through the arras.*

Loys. Assure me but . . . he 's gone !
He could not lie. Then what have I escaped,
I, who had so nigh given up happiness
For ever, to be linked with him and them ! 320
Oh, opportunist of discoveries ! I
Their Knight ? I utterly renounce them all !
Hark ! What, he meets by this the Nuncio ? Yes,
The same hyæna groan-like laughter ! Quick—
To Djabal ! I am one of them at last, 325
These simple-hearted Druses—Anael's tribe !
Djabal ! She 's mine at last. Djabal, I say !

[*Goes.*

ACT IV

Enter DJABAL

Djabal. Let me but slay the Prefect. The end now !

To-morrow will be time enough to pry
Into the means I took : suffice, they served,
Ignoble as they were, to hurl revenge
True to its object. [*Seeing the robe, etc. disposed.*

Mine should never so
Have hurried to accomplishment ! Thee, Djabal,
Far other mood befitted ! Calm the Robe
Should clothe this doom's awarder !

[*Taking the robe.*] Shall I dare
Assume my nation's Robe ? I am at least
A Druse again, chill Europe's policy
Drops from me : I dare take the Robe. Why not
The Tiar ? I rule the Druses, and what more
Betokens it than rule ?—yet—yet—

[*Lays down the tiar.*
[*Footsteps in the alcove.*] He comes !

[*Taking the sword.*
If the Sword serve, let the Tiar lie ! So, feet
Clogged with the blood of twenty years can fall
Thus lightly ! Round me, all ye ghosts ! He 'll
lift . . .

Which arm to push the arras wide ?—or both ?
Stab from the neck down to the heart—there stay !
Near he comes—nearer—the next footstep ! Now !

[*As he dashes aside the arras, ANAEL is discovered.*

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT IV

Ha! Anael! Nay, my Anael, can it be? 20
 Heard you the trumpet? I must slay him here,
 And here you ruin all. Why speak you not?
 Anael, the Prefect comes! [ANAEI screams.] So
 slow to feel

'T is not a sight for you to look upon?
 A moment's work—but such work! Till you go, 25
 I must be idle—idle, I risk all!

[Pointing to her hair.

Those locks are well, and you are beauteous thus,
 But with the dagger 't is, I have to do!

Anael. With mine!

Djabal. Blood—Anael?

Anael. Djabal, 't is thy deed!

It must be! I had hoped to claim it mine— 30

Be worthy thee—but I must needs confess

'T was not I, but thyself . . . not I have . . .

Djabal!

Speak to me!

Djabal. Oh, my punishment!

Anael. Speak to me

While I can speak! touch me, despite the blood!

When the command passed from thy soul to mine, 35

I went, fire leading me, muttering of thee,

And the approaching exaltation,—“make

“One sacrifice!” I said,—and he sat there,

Bade me approach; and, as I did approach,

Thy fire with music burst into my brain. 40

'T was but a moment's work, thou saidst—per-
 chance

It may have been so! Well, it is thy deed.

Djabal. It is my deed.

Anael. His blood all this!—this! and . . .

And more! Sustain me, Djabal! Wait not—

now

Let flash thy glory! Change thyself and me! 45

ACT IV THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

It must be ! Ere the Druses flock to us !
 At least confirm me ! Djabal, blood gushed forth—
 He was our tyrant—but I looked he 'd fall
 Prone as asleep—why else is death called sleep ?
 Sleep ? He bent o'er his breast ! 'T is sin, I
 know,—

50

Punish me, Djabal, but wilt thou let him ?
 Be it thou that punishest, not he—who creeps
 On his red breast—is here ! 'T is the small groan
 Of a child—no worse ! Bestow the new life, then !
 Too swift it cannot be, too strange, surpassing !

55

[Following him as he retreats.]

Now ! Change us both ! Change me and change
 thou !

Djabal [sinks on his knees]. Thus !

Behold my change ! You have done nobly. I !—

Anael. Can Hakeem kneel ?

Djabal. No Hakeem, and scarce Djabal !

I have dealt falsely, and this woe is come.

No—hear me ere scorn blast me ! Once and ever,

60

The deed is mine. Oh think upon the past !

Anael [to herself]. Did I strike once, or twice,
 or many times ?

Djabal. I came to lead my tribe where, bathed
 in glooms,

Doth Bahumid the Renovator sleep :

Anael, I saw my tribe : I said, “ Without

65

“ A miracle this cannot be ”—I said

“ Be there a miracle ! ”—for I saw you.

Anael. His head lies south the portal.

Djabal. —Weighed with this

The general good, how could I choose my own ?

What matter was my purity of soul ?

70

Little by little I engaged myself—

Heaven would accept me for its instrument,

I hoped : I said Heaven had accepted me.

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT IV

Anael. Is it this blood breeds dreams in me?

Who said

You were not Hakeem? And your miracles— 75
The fire that plays innocuous round your form?

[Again changing her whole manner.

Ah, thou wouldst try me—thou art Hakeem still!

Djabal. Woe—woe! As if the Druses of the
Mount

(Scarce Arabs, even there, but here, in the Isle,
Beneath their former selves) should comprehend 80
The subtle lore of Europe! A few secrets
That would not easily affect the meanest
Of the crowd there, could wholly subjugate
The best of our poor tribe. Again that eye?

Anael [after a pause springs to his neck]. Djabal,
in this there can be no deceit! 85

Why, Djabal, were you human only,—think,
Maani is but human, Khalil human,
Loys is human even—did their words
Haunt me, their looks pursue me? Shame on
you

So to have tried me! Rather, shame on me 90
So to need trying! Could I, with the Prefect
And the blood, there—could I see only you?
—Hang by your neck over this gulf of blood?
Speak, I am saved! Speak, Djabal! Am I
saved?

*[As DJABAL slowly unclasps her arms, and
puts her silently from him.*

Hakeem would save me. Thou art Djabal.
Crouch! 95

Bow to the dust, thou basest of our kind!
The pile of thee, I reared up to the cloud—
Full, midway, of our fathers' trophied tombs,
Based on the living rock, devoured not by
The unstable desert's jaws of sand,—falls prone. 100

ACT IV THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Fire, music, quenched : and now thou liest there
A ruin, obscene creatures will moan through.

—Let us come, Djabal !

Djabal.

Whither come ?

Anael.

At once—

Lest so it grow intolerable. Come !

Will I not share it with thee ? Best at once ! 105

So, feel less pain ! Let them deride,—thy tribe

Now trusting in thee,—Loys shall deride !

Come to them, hand in hand, with me !

Djabal.

Where come ?

Anael. Where?—to the Druses thou hast
wronged ! Confess,

Now that the end is gained—(I love thee now—) 110

That thou hast so deceived them—(perchance love
thee

Better than ever.) Come, receive their doom

Of infamy ! O, best of all I love thee !

Shame with the man, no triumph with the God,

Be mine ! Come !

Djabal. Never ! More shame yet ? and why ? 115

Why ? You have called this deed mine—it is mine !

And with it I accept its circumstance.

How can I longer strive with fate ? The past

Is past : my false life shall henceforth show true.

Hear me ! The argosies touch land by this ; 120

They bear us to fresh scenes and happier skies.

What if we reign together ?—if we keep

Our secret for the Druses' good ?—by means

Of even their superstition, plant in them

New life ? I learn from Europe : all who seek 125

Man's good must awe man, by such means as these.

We two will be divine to them—we are !

All great works in this world spring from the ruins

Of greater projects—ever, on our earth,

Babels men block out, Babylons they build. 130

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT IV

I wrest the weapon from your hand ! I claim
The deed ! Retire ! You have my ring—you bar
All access to the Nuncio till the forces
From Venice land.

Anael. Thou wilt feign Hakeem then ?

Djabal [*putting the Tiara of Hakeem on his head*].

And from this moment that I dare ope wide 135
Eyes that till now refused to see, begins
My true dominion : for I know myself,
And what I am to personate. No word ?

[*ANAEL goes.*

'T is come on me at last ! His blood on her——
What memories will follow that ! Her eye, 140
Her fierce distorted lip and ploughed black brow !
Ah, fool ! Has Europe then so poorly tamed
The Syrian blood from out thee ? Thou, presume
To work in this foul earth by means not foul ?
Scheme, as for heaven,—but, on the earth, be glad 145
If a least ray like heaven's be left thee !

Thus

I shall be calm—in readiness—no way
Surprised. [*A noise without.*

This should be Khalil and my Druses.
Venice is come then ! Thus I grasp thee, sword !
Druses, 't is Hakeem saves you ! In ! Behold 150
Your Prefect !

Enter LOYS. *DJABAL hides the khandjar in his robe*

Loys. Oh, well found, Djabal !—but no time
for words.

You know who waits there ?

[*Pointing to the alcove.*

Well !—and that 't is there
He meets the Nuncio ? Well ? Now, a surprise—
He there—

Djabal. I know—

ACT IV THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Loys. —is now no mortal's lord, 155
 Is absolutely powerless—call him, dead—
 He is no longer Prefect—you are Prefect!
 Oh, shrink not! I do nothing in the dark,
 Nothing unworthy Breton blood, believe!
 I understood at once your urgency 160
 That I should leave this isle for Rhodes; I felt
 What you were loath to speak—your need of help.
 I have fulfilled the task, that earnestness
 Imposed on me: have, face to face, confronted
 The Prefect in full Chapter, charged on him 165
 The enormities of his long rule; he stood
 Mute, offered no defence, no crime denied.
 On which, I spoke of you, and of your tribe,
 Your faith so like our own, and all you urged
 Of old to me: I spoke, too, of your goodness, 170
 Your patience—brief, I hold henceforth the Isle
 In charge, am nominally lord,—but you,
 You are associated in my rule—
 Are the true Prefect! Ay, such faith had they
 In my assurance of your loyalty 175
 (For who insults an imbecile old man?)
 That we assume the Prefecture this hour.
 You gaze at me? Hear greater wonders yet—
 I cast down all the fabric I have built.
 These Knights, I was prepared to worship
 but 180
 Of that another time; what's now to say,
 Is—I shall never be a Knight! Oh, Djabal,
 Here first I throw all prejudice aside,
 And call you brother! I am Druse like you:
 My wealth, my friends, my power, are wholly
 yours, 185
 Your people's, which is now my people: for
 There is a maiden of your tribe, I love—
 She loves me—Khalil's sister—

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT IV

Djabal.

Anael?

Loys.

Start you?

Seems what I say, unknightly? Thus it chanced:
When first I came, a novice, to the isle . . .

190

Enter one of the NUNCIO's Guards from the alcove

Guard. Oh horrible! Sir Loys! Here is Loys!
And here—

[*Others enter from the alcove.*

[*Pointing to DJABAL.*] Secure him, bind him—this
is he!

[*They surround DJABAL.*

Loys. Madmen—what is't you do? Stand from
my friend,
And tell me!

Guard. Thou canst have no part in this—
Surely no part! But slay him not! The Nuncio
Commanded, slay him not!

195

Loys.

Speak, or . . .

Guard.

The Prefect

Lies murdered there by him thou dost embrace.

Loys. By Djabal? Miserable fools! How
Djabal?

[*A Guard lifts DJABAL's robe; DJABAL flings
down the khandjar.*

Loys [after a pause]. Thou hast received some
insult worse than all,
Some outrage not to be endured—

[*To the Guards.*] Stand back!

200

He is my friend—more than my friend. Thou hast
Slain him upon that provocation.

Guard.

No!

No provocation! 'T is a long devised
Conspiracy: the whole tribe is involved.
He is their Khalif—'t is on that pretence—

205

Their mighty Khalif who died long ago,
And now comes back to life and light again!
All is just now revealed, I know not how,

ACT IV THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

By one of his confederates—who, struck
 With horror at this murder, first apprised 210
 The Nuncio. As 't was said, we find this Djabal
 Here where we take him.

Djabal [*aside*]. Who broke faith with me?
Loys [*to DJABAL*]. Hear'st thou? Speak! Till
 thou speak, I keep off these,
 Or die with thee. Deny this story! Thou
 A Khalif, an impostor? Thou, my friend, 215
 Whose tale was of an inoffensive tribe,
 With . . . but thou know'st—on that tale's truth
 I pledged

My faith before the Chapter: what art thou?
Djabal. Loys, I am as thou hast heard. All's
 true.

No more concealment! As these tell thee, all 220
 Was long since planned. Our Druses are enough
 To crush this handful: the Venetians land
 Even now in our behalf. Loys, we part.
 Thou, serving much, wouldst fain have served me
 more;

It might not be. I thank thee. As thou hearest, 225
 We are a separated tribe: farewell!

Loys. Oh where will truth be found now?
 Canst thou so
 Belie the Druses? Do they share thy crime?
 Those thou professest of our Breton stock,
 Are partners with thee? Why, I saw but now 230
 Khalil, my friend: he spoke with me—no word
 Of this! and Anael—whom I love, and who
 Loves me—she spoke no word of this.

Djabal. Poor boy!
 Anael, who loves thee? Khalil, fast thy friend?
 We, offsets from a wandering Count of Dreux? 235
 No: older than the oldest, princelier
 Than Europe's princeliest race, our tribe: enough

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT IV

For thine, that on our simple faith we found
A monarchy to shame your monarchies
At their own trick and secret of success. 240

The child of this our tribe shall laugh upon
The palace-step of him whose life ere night
Is forfeit, as that child shall know, and yet
Shall laugh there! What, we Druses wait forsooth
The kind interposition of a boy 245

—Can only save ourselves if thou concede :
—Khalil admire thee? He is my right-hand,
My delegate!—Anael accept thy love?
She is my bride!

Loys. Thy bride? She one of them?

Djabal. My bride!

Loys. And she retains her glorious eyes! 250
She, with those eyes, has shared this miscreant's
guilt!

Ah—who but she directed me to find
Djabal within the Prefect's chamber? Khalil
Bade me seek Djabal there, too. All is truth.
What spoke the Prefect worse of them than this? 255
Did the Church ill to institute long since
Perpetual warfare with such serpentry?
And I—have I desired to shift my part,
Evade my share in her design? 'T is well.

Djabal. Loys, I wronged thee—but unwittingly: 260
I never thought there was in thee a virtue
That could attach itself to what thou deemest
A race below thine own. I wronged thee, Loys,
But that is over: all is over now,
Save the protection I ensure against 265
My people's anger. By their Khalif's side,
Thou art secure and mayst depart: so, come!

Loys. Thy side? I take protection at thy hand?

ACT IV THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Enter other Guards

Guards. Fly with him ! Fly, Sir Loys ! 'T is too true :

And only by his side thou mayst escape. 270

The whole tribe is in full revolt : they flock
About the palace—will be here—on thee—
And there are twenty of us, we the Guards
O' the Nuncio, to withstand them ! Even we
Had stayed to meet our death in ignorance, 275

But that one Druse, a single faithful Druse,
Made known the horror to the Nuncio. Fly !
The Nuncio stands aghast. At least let us
Escape thy wrath, O Hakeem ! We are nought
In thy tribe's persecution ! [*To Loys.*] Keep by
him ! 280

They hail him Hakeem, their dead Prince returned :

He is their God, they shout, and at his beck
Are life and death !

Loys [springing at the khandjar DJABAL had thrown down, seizes him by the throat].

Thus by his side am I !

Thus I resume my knighthood and its warfare,
Thus end thee, miscreant, in thy pride of place ! 285
Thus art thou caught. Without, thy dupes may
cluster :

Friends aid thee, foes avoid thee,—thou art
Hakeem,

How say they ?—God art thou ! but also here
Is the least, youngest, meanest the Church calls
Her servant, and his single arm avails 290
To aid her as she lists. I rise, and thou
Art crushed. Hordes of thy Druses flock with-
out :

Here thou hast me, who represent the Cross,

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT IV

Honour and Faith, 'gainst Hell, Mahound and thee.

Die! [DJABAL *remains calm.*] Implore my mercy,
Hakeem, that my scorn 295

May help me! Nay, I cannot ply thy trade;
I am no Druse, no stabber: and thine eye,
Thy form, are too much as they were—my friend
Had such. Speak! Beg for mercy at my foot!
[DJABAL *still silent.*

Heaven could not ask so much of me—not, sure, 300
So much. I cannot kill him so.

[*After a pause.*] Thou art
Strong in thy cause, then—dost outbrave us, then.
Heardst thou that one of thine accomplices,
Thy very people, has accused thee? Meet
His charge! Thou hast not even slain the Prefect 305
As thy own vile creed warrants. Meet that Druse!
Come with me and disprove him—be thou tried
By him, nor seek appeal! Promise me this,
Or I will do God's office. What, shalt thou
Boast of assassins at thy beck, yet truth 310
Want even an executioner? Consent,
Or I will strike—look in my face—I will!

Djabal. Give me again my khandjar, if thou
darest! [Loys *gives it.*
Let but one Druse accuse me, and I plunge
This home. A Druse betray me? Let us go! 315
[*Aside.*] Who has betrayed me? [*Shouts without.*
Hearest thou? I hear

No plainer than long years ago I heard
That shout—but in no dream now. They return!
Wilt thou be leader with me, Loys? Well.

ACT V

The Uninitiated Druses, filling the hall tumultuously, and speaking together

Here flock we, obeying the summons. Lo, Hakeem hath appeared, and the Prefect is dead, and we return to Lebanon! My manufacture of goats' fleece must, I doubt, soon fall away there. Come, old Nasif—link thine arm in mine—we 5
fight, if needs be. Come, what is a great fight-word?
—"Lebanon?" (My daughter—my daughter!)
—But is Khalil to have the office of Hamza?—
Nay, rather, if he be wise, the monopoly of henna and cloves. Where is Hakeem?—The only prophet 10
I ever saw, prophesied at Cairo once, in my youth:
a little black Copht, dressed all in black too, with
a great stripe of yellow cloth flapping down behind
him like the back-fin of a water-serpent. Is this
he? Biamrallah! Biamreh! HAKEEM! 15

Enter the NUNCIO, with Guards

Nuncio [*to his Attendants*]. Hold both, the sorcerer and this accomplice
Ye talk of, that accuseth him! And tell
Sir Loys he is mine, the Church's hope:
Bid him approve himself our Knight indeed!
Lo, this black disemboгуing of the Isle! 20
[*To the Druses.*] Ah children, what a sight for
these old eyes
That kept themselves alive this voyage through

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT V

To smile their very last on you ! I came
 To gather one and all you wandering sheep
 Into my fold, as though a father came . . . 25
 As though, in coming, a father should . . .

[*To his Guards.*] (Ten, twelve
 —Twelve guards of you, and not an outlet? None?
 The wizards stop each avenue? Keep close !)

[*To the Druses.*] As if one came to a son's house,
 I say,
 So did I come—no guard with me—to find . . . 30
 Alas—alas !

A Druse. Who is the old man ?

Another. Oh, ye are to shout !
 Children, he styles you.

Druses. Ay, the Prefect's slain !
 Glory to the Khalif, our Father !

Nuncio. Even so
 I find, (ye prompt aright) your father slain.
 While most he plotted for your good, that father 35
 (Alas, how kind, ye never knew)—lies slain.

[*Aside.*] (And hell's worm gnaw the glozing knave
 —with me,

For being duped by his cajoleries !
 Are these the Christians? These the docile crew
 My bezants went to make me Bishop o'er ?) 40

[*To his Attendants, who whisper.*] What say ye
 does this wizard style himself?

Hakeem? Biamrallah? The third Fatemite?
 What is this jargon? He—the insane Khalif,
 Dead near three hundred years ago, come back
 In flesh and blood again?

Druses. He mutters! Hear ye? 45
 He is blaspheming Hakeem. The old man
 Is our dead Prefect's friend. Tear him !

Nuncio. Ye dare not.
 I stand here with my five-and-seventy years,

ACT V THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

The Patriarch's power behind me, God's above.
 Those years have witnessed sin enough ; ere now 50
 Misguided men arose against their lords,
 And found excuse ; but ye, to be enslaved
 By sorceries, cheats—alas ! the same tricks, tried
 On my poor children in this nook o' the earth,
 Could triumph, that have been successively 55
 Exploded, laughed to scorn, all nations through :
 “ *Romaioi, Ioudaioite kai proselutoi,*
 “ Cretes and Arabians ”—you are duped the last.
 Said I, refrain from tearing me ? I pray ye
 Tear me ! Shall I return to tell the Patriarch 60
 That so much love was wasted—every gift
 Rejected, from his benison I brought,
 Down to the galley-full of bezants, sunk
 An hour since at the harbour's mouth, by that . . .
 That . . . never will I speak his hated name ! 65
 [*To his Servants.*] What was the name his fellow
 slip-fetter

Called their arch-wizard by ? [*They whisper.*]
 Oh, Djabal was 't ?

Druses. But how a sorcerer ? false wherein ?

Nuncio. (Ay, Djabal !)

How false ? Ye know not, Djabal has confessed . . .
 Nay, that by tokens found on him we learn . . . 70
 What I sailed hither solely to divulge—
 How by his spells the demons were allured
 To seize you : not that these be aught save lies
 And mere illusions. Is this clear ? I say,
 By measures such as these, he would have led
 you 75

Into a monstrous ruin : follow ye ?

Say, shall ye perish for his sake, my sons ?

Druses. Hark ye !

Nuncio. —Be of one privilege amerced ?

No ! Infinite the Patriarch's mercies are !

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT V

No! With the Patriarch's licence, still I bid 80
Tear him to pieces who misled you! Haste!

Druses. The old man's beard shakes, and his eyes are white fire! After all, I know nothing of Djabal beyond what Karshook says; he knows but what Khalil says, who knows just what Djabal 85
says himself. Now, the little Copht Prophet, I saw at Cairo in my youth, began by promising each bystander three full measures of wheat . . .

Enter KHALIL and the initiated DRUSES

Khalil. Venice and her deliverance are at hand: Their fleet stands through the harbour. Hath he slain 90

The Prefect yet? Is Djabal's change come yet?

Nuncio [*to Attendants*]. What's this of Venice? who's this boy?

[*Attendants whisper.*] One Khalil?

Djabal's accomplice, Loys called, but now, The only Druse, save Djabal's self, to fear?

[*To the Druses.*] I cannot hear ye with these aged ears : 95

Is it so? Ye would have my troops assist?

Doth he abet him in his sorceries?

Down with the cheat, guards, as my children bid!

[*They spring at KHALIL; as he beats them back,*

Stay! No more bloodshed! Spare deluded youth! Whom seek'st thou? (I will teach him)—whom, my child? 100

Thou know'st not what these know, what these declare.

I am an old man as thou seest—have done

With life; and what should move me but the truth?

Art thou the only fond one of thy tribe?

'T is I interpret for thy tribe.

ACT V THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Khalil.

Oh, this

105

Is the expected Nuncio! Druses, hear—
Endure ye this? Unworthy to partake
The glory Hakeem gains you! While I speak,
The ships touch land: who makes for Lebanon?
They plant the winged lion in these halls!

110

Nuncio [aside]. If it be true! Venice? Oh,
never true!

Yet Venice would so gladly thwart our Knights,
So fain get footing here, stand close by Rhodes!
Oh, to be duped this way!

Khalil.

Ere he appear

And lead you gloriously, repent, I say!

115

Nuncio [aside]. Nor any way to stretch the arch-
wizard stark

Ere the Venetians come? Cut off the head,
The trunk were easily stilled. [*To the Druses.*]
He? Bring him forth!

Since so you needs will have it, I assent.

You 'd judge him, say you, on the spot—confound 120
The sorcerer in his very circle? Where 's
Our short black-bearded sallow friend who swore
He 'd earn the Patriarch's guerdon by one stab?
Bring Djabal forth at once!

Druses.

Ay, bring him forth!

The Patriarch drives a trade in oil and silk,
And we 're the Patriarch's children—true men, we!
Where is the glory? Show us all the glory!

125

Khalil. You dare not so insult him! What,
not see . . .

(I tell thee, Nuncio, these are uninstructed,
Untrusted: they know nothing of our Khalif!)
—Not see that if he lets a doubt arise
'T is but to give yourselves the chance of seeming
To have some influence in your own Return!
That all may say ye would have trusted him

130

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT V

Without the all-convincing glory—ay, 135
And did ! Embrace the occasion, friends ! For,
think—

What wonder when his change takes place ? But
now

For your sakes, he should not reveal himself.

No : could I ask and have, I would not ask

The change yet !

Enter DJABAL and LOYS

Spite of all, reveal thyself ! 140

I had said, pardon them for me—for Anael—

For our sakes pardon these besotted men—

Ay, for thine own—they hurt not thee ! Yet now

One thought swells in me and keeps down all else.

This Nuncio couples shame with thee, has called 145

Imposture thy whole course, all bitter things

Has said : he is but an old fretful man !

Hakeem—nay, I must call thee Hakeem now—

Reveal thyself ! See ! Where is Anael ? See !

Loys [to DJABAL]. Here are thy people. Keep
thy word to me ! 150

Djabal. Who of my people hath accused me ?

Nuncio. So !

So this is Djabal, Hakeem, and what not ?

A fit deed, Loys, for thy first Knight's day !

May it be augury of thy after-life !

Ever prove truncheon of the Church as now 155

That, Nuncio of the Patriarch, having charge

Of the Isle here, I claim thee [*turning to DJABAL*]
as these bid me,

Forfeit for murder done thy lawful prince,

Thou conjurer that peep'st and mutterest !

Why should I hold thee from their hands ? (Spells,
children ? 160

But hear how I dispose of all his spells !)

ACT V THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Thou art a prophet?—wouldst entice thy tribe
From me?—thou workest miracles? (Attend!
Let him but move me with his spells!) I, Nuncio . . .

Djabal. . . . Which how thou camest to be, I
say not now,

165

Though I have also been at Stamboul, Luke!
Ply thee with spells, forsooth! What need of
spells?

If Venice, in her Admiral's person, stoop
To ratify thy compact with her foe,
The Hospitallers, for this Isle—withdraw
Her warrant of the deed which reinstates
My people in their freedom, tricked away
By him I slew,—refuse to convoy us

170

To Lebanon and keep the Isle we leave—
Then will be time to try what spells can do!

175

Dost thou dispute the Republic's power?

Nuncio.

Lo ye!

He tempts me too, the wily exorcist!

No! The renowned Republic was and is
The Patriarch's friend: 't is not for courting Venice
That I—that these implore thy blood of me.

180

Lo ye, the subtle miscreant! Ha, so subtle?

Ye, Druses, hear him. Will ye be deceived?

How he evades me! Where 's the miracle

He works? I bid him to the proof—fish up

Your galley-full of bezants that he sank!

185

That were a miracle! One miracle!

Enough of trifling, for it chafes my years.

I am the Nuncio, Druses! I stand forth

To save you from the good Republic's rage

When she shall find her fleet was summoned here

190

To aid the mummeries of a knave like this.

[*As the Druses hesitate, his Attendants whisper.*

Ah, well suggested! Why, we hold the while

One who, his close confederate till now,

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT V

Confesses Djabal at the last a cheat,
And every miracle a cheat. Who throws me 195
His head? I make three offers, once I offer,—
And twice . . .

Djabal. Let who moves perish at my foot!

Khalil. Thanks, Hakeem, thanks! Oh, Anael,
Maani,

Why tarry they?

Druses [to each other]. He can! He can! Live
fire—

[*To the NUNCIO.*] I say he can, old man! Thou
know'st him not. 200

Live fire like that thou seest now in his eyes,
Plays fawning round him. See! The change
begins.

All the brow lightens as he lifts his arm.

Look not at me! It was not I!

Djabal. What Druse
Accused me, as he saith? I bid each bone 205
Crumble within that Druse! None, Loys, none
Of my own people, as thou said'st, have raised
A voice against me.

Nuncio [aside]. Venice to come! Death!

Djabal [continuing]. Confess and go unscathed,
however false!

Seest thou my Druses, Luke? I would submit 210
To thy pure malice did one Druse confess!

How said I, Loys?

Nuncio [to his Attendants who whisper]. Ah, ye
counsel so?

[*Aloud.*] Bring in the witness, then, who, first of all,
Disclosed the treason! Now I have thee, wizard!
Ye hear that? If one speaks, he bids you tear him 215
Joint after joint: well then, one does speak! One,
Befooled by Djabal, even as yourselves,
But who hath voluntarily proposed

ACT V THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

To expiate, by confessing thus, the fault
Of having trusted him.

[*They bring in a veiled Druse.*

Loys. Now, Djabal, now! 220

Nuncio. Friend, Djabal fronts thee! Make a
ring, sons. Speak!

Expose this Djabal—what he was, and how :
The wiles he used, the aims he cherished : all,
Explicitly as late 't was spoken to these
My servants : I absolve and pardon thee. 225

Loys. Thou hast the dagger ready, Djabal?

Djabal. Speak,
Recreant!

Druses. Stand back, fool! farther! Suddenly
You shall see some huge serpent glide from
under

The empty vest, or down will thunder crash!
Back, Khalil!

Khalil. I go back? Thus go I back! 230
[*To ANAEL.*] Unveil! Nay, thou shalt face the
Khalif! Thus!

[*He tears away ANAEL's veil; DJABAL folds
his arms and bows his head; the Druses
fall back; LOYS springs from the side of
DJABAL and the NUNCIO.*

Loys. Then she was true—she only of them all!
True to her eyes—may keep those glorious eyes,
And now be mine, once again mine! Oh, Anael!
Dared I think thee a partner in his crime— 235
That blood could soil that hand? nay, 't is mine
—Anael,

—Not mine?—who offer thee before all these
My heart, my sword, my name—so thou wilt say
That Djabal, who affirms thou art his bride,
Lies—say but that he lies!

Djabal. Thou, Anael? 240

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT V

Loys. Nay, Djabal, nay, one chance for me—
the last!

Thou hast had every other; thou hast spoken
Days, nights, what falsehood listed thee—let me
Speak first now; I will speak now!

Nuncio. Loys, pause!

Thou art the Duke's son, Bretagne's choicest stock, 245
Loys of Dreux, God's sepulchre's first sword:
This wilt thou spit on, this degrade, this trample
To earth?

Loys [to ANAEL]. Who had foreseen that one day,
Loys

Would stake these gifts against some other good
In the whole world? I give them thee! I would 250
My strong will might bestow real shape on them,
That I might see, with my own eyes, thy foot
Tread on their very neck! 'T is not by gifts
I put aside this Djabal: we will stand—

We do stand, see, two men! Djabal, stand forth! 255
Who's worth her, I or thou? I—who for Anael
Uprightly, purely kept my way, the long
True way—left thee each by-path, boldly lived
Without the lies and blood,—or thou, or thou?
Me! love me, Anael! Leave the blood and him! 260
[To DJABAL.] Now speak—now, quick on this that

I have said,—

Thou with the blood, speak if thou art a man!

Djabal [to ANAEL]. And was it thou betrayedst
me? 'T is well!

I have deserved this of thee, and submit.

Nor 't is much evil thou inflict: life 265

Ends here. The cedars shall not wave for us:

For there was crime, and must be punishment.

See fate! By thee I was seduced, by thee

I perish: yet do I—can I repent?

I with my Arab instinct, thwarted ever 270

ACT V THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

By my Frank policy,—and with, in turn,
 My Frank brain, thwarted by my Arab heart—
 While these remained in equipoise, I lived
 —Nothing ; had either been predominant,
 As a Frank schemer or an Arab mystic, 275
 I had been something ;—now, each has de-
 stroyed

The other—and behold, from out their crash,
 A third and better nature rises up—
 My mere man's-nature ! And I yield to it :
 I love thee, I who did not love before ! 280

Anael. Djabal !

Djabal. It seemed love, but it was not love :
 How could I love while thou adoredst me ?
 Now thou despisest, art above me so
 Immeasurably ! Thou, no other, doomest 285
 My death now ; this my steel shall execute
 Thy judgment ; I shall feel thy hand in it.
 Oh luxury to worship, to submit,
 Transcended, doomed to death by thee !

Anael. My Djabal !

Djabal. Dost hesitate ? I force thee then.
 Approach,

Druses ! for I am out of reach of fate ; 290
 No further evil waits me. Speak the doom !
 Here, Druses, and hear, Nuncio, and hear, Loys !

Anael. HAKEEM ! *[She falls dead.*

[The Druses scream, grovelling before him.

Druses. Ah Hakeem !—not on me thy wrath !
 Biamrallah, pardon ! never doubted I !
 Ha, dog, how sayest thou ?

*[They surround and seize the NUNCIO and his
 Guards. LOYS flings himself upon the
 body of ANAEL, on which DJABAL con- 295
 tinues to gaze as stupefied.*

Nuncio. Caitiffs ! Have ye eyes ?

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT V

Whips, racks should teach you ! What, his fools ?
his dupes ?

Leave me ! Unhand me !

Khalil [approaching DJABAL timidly]. Save her
for my sake !

She was already thine ; she would have shared

To-day thine exaltation : think, this day

Her hair was plaited thus because of thee !

300

Yes, feel the soft bright hair—feel !

Nuncio [struggling with those who have seized him].

What, because

His leman dies for him ? You think it hard

To die ? Oh, would you were at Rhodes, and choice

Of deaths should suit you !

Khalil [bending over ANAEL'S body]. Just re-
store her life !

So little does it ! there—the eyelids tremble !

305

'T was not my breath that made them : and the lips

Move of themselves. I could restore her life !

Hakeem, we have forgotten—have presumed

On our free converse : we are better taught.

See, I kiss—how I kiss thy garment's hem

310

For her ! She kisses it—Oh, take her deed

In mine ! Thou dost believe now, Anael ?—See,

She smiles ! Were her lips open o'er the teeth

Thus, when I spoke first ? She believes in thee !

Go not without her to the cedars, lord !

315

Or leave us both—I cannot go alone !

I have obeyed thee, if I dare so speak :

Hath Hakeem thus forgot all Djabal knew ?

Thou feelest then my tears fall hot and fast

Upon thy hand, and yet thou speakest not ?

320

Ere the Venetian trumpet sound—ere thou

Exalt thyself, O Hakeem ! save thou her !

Nuncio. And the accursed Republic will arrive
And find me in their toils—dead, very like,

ACT V THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

Under their feet !

What way—not one way yet 325
To foil them? None? [*Observing DJABAL's face.*

What ails the Khalif? Ah,
That ghastly face! A way to foil them yet!
[*To the Druses.*] Look to your Khalif, Druses!

Is that face
God Hakeem's? Where is triumph,—where is
. . . what

Said he of exaltation—hath he promised 330

So much to-day? Why then, exalt thyself!
Cast off that husk, thy form, set free thy soul
In splendour! Now, bear witness! here I stand—
I challenge him exalt himself, and I
Become, for that, a Druse like all of you ! 335

The Druses. Exalt thyself! Exalt thyself, O
Hakeem!

Djabal [advances]. I can confess now all from
first to last.

There is no longer shame for me. I am . . .

[*Here the Venetian trumpet sounds: the
Druses shout, DJABAL's eye catches the
expression of those about him, and, as
the old dream comes back, he is again
confident and inspired.*

—Am I not Hakeem? And ye would have crawled
But yesterday within these impure courts 340

Where now ye stand erect! Not grand enough?

—What more could be conceded to such beasts

As all of you, so sunk and base as you,

Than a mere man? A man among such beasts

Was miracle enough: yet him you doubt, 345

Him you forsake, him fain would you destroy—

With the Venetians at your gate, the Nuncio

Thus—(see the baffled hypocrite!) and, best,

The Prefect there!

THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES ACT V

Druses. No, Hakeem, ever thine !

Nuncio. He lies—and twice he lies—and thrice
he lies !

350

Exalt thyself, Mahound ! Exalt thyself !

Djabal. Druses ! we shall henceforth be far
away—

Out of mere mortal ken—above the cedars—

But we shall see ye go, hear ye return,

Repeopling the old solitudes,—through thee,

355

My Khalil ! Thou art full of me : I fill

Thee full—my hands thus fill thee ! Yestereve,

—Nay, but this morn, I deemed thee ignorant

Of all to do, requiring word of mine

To teach it : now, thou hast all gifts in one,

360

With truth and purity go other gifts,

All gifts come clustering to that. Go, lead

My people home whate'er betide !

[*Turning to the Druses.*] Ye take

This Khalil for my delegate ? To him

Bow as to me ? He leads to Lebanon—

365

Ye follow ?

Druses. We follow ! Now exalt thyself !

Djabal [*raises Loys*]. Then to thee, Loys !

How I wronged thee, Loys !

Yet, wronged, no less thou shalt have full revenge,

Fit for thy noble self, revenge—and thus.

Thou, loaded with such wrongs, the princely soul,

370

The first sword of Christ's sepulchre—thou shalt

Guard Khalil and my Druses home again !

Justice, no less, God's justice—and no more,

For those I leave ! To seeking this, devote

Some few days out of thy Knight's brilliant life :

375

And, this obtained them, leave their Lebanon,

My Druses' blessing in thine ears—(they shall

Bless thee with blessing sure to have its way)

—One cedar-blossom in thy ducal cap,

ACT V THE RETURN OF THE DRUSES

One thought of Anael in thy heart,—perchance, 380
 One thought of him who thus, to bid thee speed,
 His last word to the living speaks ! This done,
 Resume thy course, and, first amidst the first
 In Europe, take my heart along with thee !
 Go boldly, go serenely, go augustly— 385
 What shall withstand thee then ?

[*He bends over ANAEL.*] And last to thee !
 Ah, did I dream I was to have, this day,
 Exalted thee ? A vain dream : hast thou not
 Won greater exaltation ? What remains
 But press to thee, exalt myself to thee ? 390
 Thus I exalt myself, set free my soul !

[*He stabs himself. As he falls, supported by
 KHALIL and LOYS, the Venetians enter ;
 the ADMIRAL advances.*]

Admiral. God and St. Mark for Venice ! Plant
 the Lion !

[*At the clash of the planted standard, the
 Druses shout and move tumultuously
 forward, LOYS drawing his sword.*]

Djabal [*leading them a few steps between KHALIL
 and LOYS*]. On to the Mountain ! At the
 Mountain, Druses ! [Dies.]

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

A TRAGEDY

PERSONS

MILDRED TRESHAM

GUENDOLEN TRESHAM

THOROLD, Earl TRESHAM

AUSTIN TRESHAM

HENRY, Earl MERTOUN

GERARD, *and other retainers of* Lord TRESHAM

TIME, 17—

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

1843

ACT I

SCENE I.—*The interior of a lodge in Lord TRESHAM'S park. Many Retainers crowded at the window, supposed to command a view of the entrance to his mansion. GERARD, the war-rener, his back to a table on which are flagons, etc.*

1st Retainer. Ay, do ! push, friends, and then
you 'll push down me !

—What for ? Does any hear a runner's foot
Or a steed's trample or a coach-wheel's cry ?
Is the Earl come or his least poursuivant ?
But there 's no breeding in a man of you
Save Gerard yonder : here 's a half-place yet,
Old Gerard !

5

Gerard. Save your courtesies, my friend.
Here is my place.

2nd Retainer. Now, Gerard, out with it !
What makes you sullen, this of all the days
I' the year ? To-day that young rich bountiful
Handsome Earl Mertoun, whom alone they match
With our Lord Tresham through the country-side,
Is coming here in utmost bravery
To ask our master's sister's hand ?

10

Gerard.

What then ?

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

2nd Retainer. What then? Why, you, she
speaks to, if she meets 15

Your worship, smiles on as you hold apart
The boughs to let her through her forest walks,
You, always favourite for your no-deserts,
You 've heard, these three days, how Earl Mer-
toun sues

To lay his heart and house and broad lands too 20
At Lady Mildred's feet : and while we squeeze
Ourselves into a mousehole lest we miss
One congee of the least page in his train,
You sit o' one side—"there 's the Earl," say I—
"What then?" say you!

3rd Retainer. I 'll wager he has let 25
Both swans he tamed for Lady Mildred swim
Over the falls and gain the river!

Gerard. Ralph,
Is not to-morrow my inspecting-day
For you and for your hawks?

4th Retainer. Let Gerard be!
He 's coarse-grained, like his carved black cross-
bow stock. 30
Ha, look now, while we squabble with him, look!
Well done, now—is not this beginning, now,
To purpose?

1st Retainer. Our retainers look as fine—
That 's comfort. Lord, how Richard holds him-
self
With his white staff! Will not a knave behind 35
Prick him upright?

4th Retainer. He 's only bowing, fool!
The Earl's man bent us lower by this much.

1st Retainer. That 's comfort. Here 's a very
cavalcade!

3rd Retainer. I don't see wherefore Richard,
and his troop

SCENE I A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Of silk and silver varlets there, should find 40
 Their perfumed selves so indispensable
 On high days, holidays ! Would it so disgrace
 Our family, if I, for instance, stood—
 In my right hand a cast of Swedish hawks,
 A leash of greyhounds in my left?—

Gerard. —With Hugh 45

The logman for supporter, in his right
 The bill-hook, in his left the brushwood-shears !

3rd Retainer. Out on you, crab ! What next,
 what next ? The Earl !

1st Retainer. Oh Walter, groom, our horses, do
 they match

The Earl's ? Alas, that first pair of the six— 50
 They paw the ground—Ah Walter ! and that brute
 Just on his haunches by the wheel !

6th Retainer. Ay—ay !

You, Philip, are a special hand, I hear,
 At soups and sauces : what 's a horse to you ?
 D' ye mark that beast they 've slid into the midst 55
 So cunningly ?—then, Philip, mark this further ;
 No leg has he to stand on !

1st Retainer. No ? That 's comfort.

2nd Retainer. Peace, Cook ! The Earl de-
 scends. Well, Gerard, see

The Earl at least ! Come, there 's a proper man,
 I hope ! Why, Ralph, no falcon, Pole or Swede, 60
 Has got a starrier eye.

3rd Retainer. His eyes are blue :

But leave my hawks alone !

4th Retainer. So young, and yet

So tall and shapely !

5th Retainer. Here 's Lord Tresham's self !

There now—there 's what a nobleman should be !
 He 's older, graver, loftier, he 's more like 65
 A House's head.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

2nd Retainer. But you 'd not have a boy
—And what 's the Earl beside?—possess too soon
That stateliness?

1st Retain:r. Our master takes his hand—
Richard and his white staff are on the move—
Back fall our people—(tsh!—there 's Timothy 70
Sure to get tangled in his ribbon-ties,
And Peter's cursed rosette 's a-coming off!)
—At last I see our lord's back and his friend's;
And the whole beautiful bright company
Close round them—in they go! [*Jumping down
from the window-bench, and making for the table
and its jugs.*] Good health, long life, 75
Great joy to our Lord Tresham and his House!

6th Retainer. My father drove his father first to
court,
After his marriage-day—ay, did he!

2nd Retainer. God bless
Lord Tresham, Lady Mildred, and the Earl!
Here, Gerard, reach your beaker!

Gerard. Drink, my boys! 80
Don't mind me—all 's not right about me—drink!
2nd Retainer [*aside*]. He 's vexed, now, that he
let the show escape!

[*To GERARD.*] Remember that the Earl returns
this way.

Gerard. That way?

2nd Retainer. Just so.

Gerard. Then my way 's here. [*Goes.*

2nd Retainer. Old Gerard
Will die soon—mind, I said it! He was used 85
To care about the pitifullest thing
That touched the House's honour, not an eye
But his could see wherein: and on a cause
Of scarce a quarter this importance, Gerard
Fairly had fretted flesh and bone away 90

SCENE II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

In cares that this was right, nor that was wrong,
Such point decorous, and such square by rule—
He knew such niceties, no herald more :

And now—you see his humour : die he will !

2nd Retainer. God help him ! Who 's for the
great servants'-hall

95

To hear what 's going on inside ? They 'd follow
Lord Tresham into the saloon.

3rd Retainer.

I !—

4th Retainer.

I !—

Leave Frank alone for catching, at the door,
Some hint of how the parley goes inside !

Prosperity to the great House once more !

100

Here 's the last drop !

1st Retainer. Have at you ! Boys, hurrah !

SCENE II.—*A Saloon in the Mansion*

Enter Lord TRESHAM, Lord MERTOUN, AUSTIN,
and GUENDOLEN

Tresham. I welcome you, Lord Mertoun, yet
once more,

To this ancestral roof of mine. Your name
—Noble among the noblest in itself,

Yet taking in your person, fame avers,

105

New price and lustre,—(as that gem you wear,

Transmitted from a hundred knightly breasts,

Fresh chased and set and fixed by its last lord,

Seems to re-kindle at the core)—your name

Would win you welcome !—

Mertoun.

Thanks !

Tresham.

—But add to that, 110

The worthiness and grace and dignity

Of your proposal for uniting both

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

Our Houses even closer than respect
 Unites them now—add these, and you must grant
 One favour more, nor that the least,—to think 115
 The welcome I should give;—'tis given! My lord,
 My only brother, Austin : he 's the king's.
 Our cousin, Lady Guendolen—betrothed
 To Austin : all are yours.

Mertoun. I thank you—less
 For the expressed commendings which your seal, 120
 And only that, authenticates—forbids
 My putting from me . . . to my heart I take
 Your praise . . . but praise less claims my gratitude,
 Than the indulgent insight it implies
 Of what must needs be uppermost with one 125
 Who comes, like me, with the bare leave to ask,
 In weighed and measured unimpassioned words,
 A gift, which, if as calmly 't is denied,
 He must withdraw, content upon his cheek,
 Despair within his soul. That I dare ask 130
 Firmly, near boldly, near with confidence
 That gift, I have to thank you. Yes, Lord Tresham,
 I love your sister—as you 'd have one love
 That lady . . . oh more, more I love her! Wealth,
 Rank, all the world thinks me, they 're yours, you
 know, 135

To hold or part with, at your choice—but grant
 My true self, me without a rood of land,
 A piece of gold, a name of yesterday,
 Grant me that lady, and you . . . Death or life?

Guendolen [*apart to AUSTIN*]. Why, this is loving,
 Austin!

Austin. He 's so young! 140

Guendolen. Young? Old enough, I think, to
 half surmise

He never had obtained an entrance here,
 Were all this fear and trembling needed.

SCENE II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Austin.

Hush!

He reddens.

Guendolen. Mark him, Austin; that's true love!
Ours must begin again.

Tresham.

We'll sit, my lord.

145

Ever with best desert goes diffidence.

I may speak plainly nor be misconceived.

That I am wholly satisfied with you

On this occasion, when a falcon's eye

Were dull compared with mine to search out faults, 150

Is somewhat. Mildred's hand is hers to give

Or to refuse.

Mertoun.

But you, you grant my suit?

I have your word if hers?

Tresham.

My best of words

If hers encourage you. I trust it will.

Have you seen Lady Mildred, by the way?

155

Mertoun. I . . . I . . . our two demesnes,
remember, touch;

I have been used to wander carelessly

After my stricken game: the heron roused

Deep in my woods, has trailed its broken wing

Thro' thicks and glades a mile in yours,—or else 160

Some eyass ill-reclaimed has taken flight

And lured me after her from tree to tree,

I marked not whither. I have come upon

The lady's wondrous beauty unaware,

And—and then . . . I have seen her.

Guendolen [*aside to AUSTIN*]. Note that mode 165

Of faltering out that, when a lady passed,

He, having eyes, did see her! You had said—

“On such a day I scanned her, head to foot;

“Observed a red, where red should not have been,

“Outside her elbow; but was pleased enough 170

“Upon the whole.” Let such irreverent talk

Be lessoned for the future!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

Tresham. What 's to say
May be said briefly. She has never known
A mother's care ; I stand for father too.
Her beauty is not strange to you, it seems— 175
You cannot know the good and tender heart,
Its girl's trust and its woman's constancy,
How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
As light where friends are—how imbued with lore 180
The world most prizes, yet the simplest, yet
The . . . one might know I talked of Mildred—
thus

We brothers talk !

Mertoun. I thank you.

Tresham. In a word,
Control 's not for this lady ; but her wish
To please me outstrips in its subtlety 185
My power of being pleased : herself creates
The want she means to satisfy. My heart
Prefers your suit to her as 't were its own.
Can I say more ?

Mertoun. No more—thanks, thanks—no
more !

Tresham. This matter then discussed . . .

Mertoun. —We 'll waste no breath 190
On aught less precious. I 'm beneath the roof
Which holds her : while I thought of that, my
speech

To you would wander—as it must not do,
Since as you favour me I stand or fall.
I pray you suffer that I take my leave ! 195

Tresham. With less regret 't is suffered, that
again

We meet, I hope, so shortly.

Mertoun. We ? again ?—

Ah yes, forgive me—when shall . . . you will crown

SCENE II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Your goodness by forthwith apprising me
When . . . if . . . the lady will appoint a day 200
For me to wait on you—and her.

Tresham. So soon
As I am made acquainted with her thoughts
On your proposal—howsoe'er they lean—
A messenger shall bring you the result.

Mertoun. You cannot bind me more to you,
my lord. 205
Farewell till we renew . . . I trust, renew
A converse ne'er to disunite again.

Tresham. So may it prove !

Mertoun. You, lady, you, sir, take
My humble salutation !

Guendolen and Austin. Thanks !

Tresham. Within there !

[*Servants enter. TRESHAM conducts MERTOUN to the door. Meantime AUSTIN remarks,*

Well,

Here I have an advantage of the Earl, 210
Confess now ! I 'd not think that all was safe
Because my lady's brother stood my friend !
Why, he makes sure of her—"do you say, yes—
"She 'll not say, no,"—what comes it to beside ?
I should have prayed the brother, "speak this
speech, 215

"For Heaven's sake urge this on her—put in
this—

"Forget not, as you 'd save me, t' other thing,—
"Then set down what she says, and how she looks,
"And if she smiles, and" (in an under breath)
"Only let her accept me, and do you 220

"And all the world refuse me, if you dare !"

Guendolen. That way you 'd take, friend Austin ?
What a shame

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

I was your cousin, tamely from the first
Your bride, and all this fervour 's run to waste !
Do you know you speak sensibly to-day ? 225
The Earl 's a fool.

Austin. Here 's Thorold. Tell him so !
Tresham [*returning*]. Now, voices, voices ! 'St !
the lady 's first !

How seems he ?—seems he not . . . come, faith
give fraud

The mercy-stroke whenever they engage !
Down with fraud, up with faith ! How seems the
Earl ? 230

A name ! a blazon ! if you knew their worth,
As you will never ! come—the Earl ?

Guendolen. He 's young.

Tresham. What 's she ? an infant save in heart
and brain.

Young ! Mildred is fourteen, remark ! And
you . . .

Austin, how old is she ?

Guendolen. There 's tact for you ! 235

I meant that being young was good excuse
If one should tax him . . .

Tresham. Well ?

Guendolen. —With lacking wit.

Tresham. He lacked wit ? Where might he
lack wit, so please you ?

Guendolen. In standing straighter than the
steward's rod

And making you the tiresomest harangue, 240
Instead of slipping over to my side

And softly whispering in my ear, " Sweet lady,
" Your cousin there will do me detriment
" He little dreams of : he 's absorbed, I see,
" In my old name and fame—be sure he 'll leave 245
" My Mildred, when his best account of me

SCENE II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

"Is ended, in full confidence I wear

"My grandsire's periwig down either cheek.

"I'm lost unless your gentleness vouchsafes" . . .

Tresham. . . . "To give a best of best accounts,
yourself,

250

"Of me and my demerits." You are right!

He should have said what now I say for him.

Yon golden creature, will you help us all?

Here's Austin means to vouch for much, but you

—You are . . . what Austin only knows! Come

up,

255

All three of us: she's in the library

No doubt, for the day's wearing fast. Precede!

Guendolen. Austin, how we must—!

Tresham. Must what? Must speak truth,
Malignant tongue! Detect one fault in him!

I challenge you!

Guendolen. Witchcraft's a fault in him,

260

For you're bewitched.

Tresham. What's urgent we obtain

Is, that she soon receive him—say, to-morrow—

Next day at furthest.

Guendolen. Ne'er instruct me!

Tresham. Come!

—He's out of your good graces, since forsooth,

He stood not as he'd carry us by storm

265

With his perfections! You're for the composed

Manly assured becoming confidence!

—Get her to say, "to-morrow," and I'll give
you . . .

I'll give you black Urganda, to be spoiled

With petting and snail-paces. Will you? Come! 270

SCENE III.—MILDRED'S *chamber. A painted window overlooks the park.* MILDRED and GUENDOLEN

Guendolen. Now, Mildred, spare those pains.
I have not left

Our talkers in the library, and climbed
The wearisome ascent to this your bower
In company with you,—I have not dared . . .
Nay, worked such prodigies as sparing you 275
Lord Mertoun's pedigree before the flood,
Which Thorold seemed in very act to tell
—Or bringing Austin to pluck up that most
Firm-rooted heresy—your suitor's eyes,
He would maintain, were grey instead of blue— 280
I think I brought him to contrition!—Well,
I have not done such things, (all to deserve
A minute's quiet cousin's talk with you,)
To be dismissed so coolly.

Mildred.

Guendolen!

What have I done? what could suggest . . .

Guendolen.

There, there! 285

Do I not comprehend you 'd be alone
To throw those testimonies in a heap,
Thorold's enlargings, Austin's brevities,
With that poor silly heartless Guendolen's
Ill-timed misplaced attempted smartnesses— 290
And sift their sense out? now, I come to spare
you

Nearly a whole night's labour. Ask and have!
Demand, be answered! Lack I ears and eyes?
Am I perplexed which side of the rock-table
The Conqueror dined on when he landed first, 295
Lord Mertoun's ancestor was bidden take—

SCENE III A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

The bow-hand or the arrow-hand's great meed?
Mildred, the Earl has soft blue eyes!

Mildred. My brother—
Did he . . . you said that he received him well?

Guendolen. If I said only "well" I said not much. 300
Oh, stay—which brother?

Mildred. Thorold! who—who else?

Guendolen. Thorold (a secret) is too proud by
half,—

Nay, hear me out—with us he's even gentler
Than we are with our birds. Of this great House
The least retainer that e'er caught his glance 305

Would die for him, real dying—no mere talk:
And in the world, the court, if men would cite
The perfect spirit of honour, Thorold's name
Rises of its clear nature to their lips.

But he should take men's homage, trust in it, 310
And care no more about what drew it down.
He has desert, and that, acknowledgment;
Is he content?

Mildred. You wrong him, Guendolen.

Guendolen. He's proud, confess; so proud with
brooding o'er

The light of his interminable line, 315
An ancestry with men all paladins,
And women all . . .

Mildred. Dear Guendolen, 't is late!
When yonder purple pane the climbing moon
Pierces, I know 't is midnight.

Guendolen. Well, that Thorold
Should rise up from such musings, and receive 320
One come audaciously to graft himself
Into this peerless stock, yet find no flaw,
No slightest spot in such an one . . .

Mildred. Who finds
A spot in Mertoun?

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

Guendolen. Not your brother ; therefore,
Not the whole world.

Mildred. I am weary, Guendolen. 325
Bear with me !

Guendolen. I am foolish.

Mildred. Oh no, kind !
But I would rest.

Guendolen. Good night and rest to you !
I said how gracefully his mantle lay
Beneath the rings of his light hair ?

Mildred. Brown hair.

Guendolen. Brown ? why, it is brown : how
could you know that ? 330

Mildred. How ? did not you—Oh, Austin 't was,
declared
His hair was light, not brown—my head !—and
look,

The moon-beam purpling the dark chamber !
Sweet,

Good night !

Guendolen. Forgive me—sleep the soundlier
for me !
[*Going, she turns suddenly.*

Mildred ! 335

Perdition ! all 's discovered ! Thorold finds
—That the Earl's greatest of all grandmothers
Was grander daughter still—to that fair dame
Whose garter slipped down at the famous dance !

[*Goes.*

Mildred. Is she—can she be really gone at last ? 340
My heart ! I shall not reach the window. Needs
Must I have sinned much, so to suffer.

[*She lifts the small lamp which is suspended
before the Virgin's image in the window,
and places it by the purple pane.*

There !

[*She returns to the seat in front.*

SCENE III A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Mildred and Mertoun ! Mildred, with consent
Of all the world and Thorold, Mertoun's bride !
Too late ! 'T is sweet to think of, sweeter still 345
To hope for, that this blessed end soothes up
The curse of the beginning ; but I know
It comes too late : 't will sweetest be of all
To dream my soul away and die upon.

[*A noise without.*
The voice ! Oh why, why glided sin the snake 350
Into the paradise Heaven meant us both ?

[*The window opens softly. A low voice sings.*
There's a woman like a dew-drop, she's so purer than the purest ;
And her noble heart's the noblest, yes, and her sure faith's the surest :
And her eyes are dark and humid, like the depth on depth of lustre
Hid i' the harebell, while her tresses, sunnier than the wild-grape
cluster, 355
Gush in golden-tinted plenty down her neck's rose-misted marble :
Then her voice's music . . . call it the well's bubbling, the bird's
warble !

[*A figure wrapped in a mantle appears at the*
window.
And this woman says, " My days were sunless and my nights were
moonless,
" Parched the pleasant April herbage, and the lark's heart's out-
break tuneless,
" If you loved me not ! " And I who—(ah, for words of flame !)
adore her, 360
Who am mad to lay my spirit prostrate palpably before her—

[*He enters, approaches her seat, and bends*
over her.

I may enter at her portal soon, as now her lattice takes me,
And by noontide as by midnight make her mine, as hers she makes me !

[*The Earl throws off his slouched hat and*
long cloak.

My very heart sings, so I sing, Beloved !
Mildred. Sit, Henry—do not take my hand !

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

Mertoun.

'T is mine. 365

The meeting that appalled us both so much
Is ended.

Mildred. What begins now?

Mertoun.

Happiness

Such as the world contains not.

Mildred.

That is it.

Our happiness would, as you say, exceed
The whole world's best of blisses : we—do we
Deserve that? Utter to your soul, what mine
Long since, Beloved, has grown used to hear,
Like a death-knell, so much regarded once,
And so familiar now ; this will not be !

370

Mertoun. Oh, Mildred, have I met your
brother's face,

375

Compelled myself—if not to speak untruth,
Yet to disguise, to shun, to put aside
The truth, as—what had e'er prevailed on me
Save you, to venture? Have I gained at last
Your brother, the one scarer of your dreams,
And waking thoughts' sole apprehension too?
Does a new life, like a young sunrise, break
On the strange unrest of our night, confused
With rain and stormy flaw—and will you see
No dripping blossoms, no fire-tinted drops
On each live spray, no vapour steaming up,
And no expressless glory in the East?

380

385

When I am by you, to be ever by you,
When I have won you and may worship you,
Oh, Mildred, can you say "this will not be" ?

390

Mildred. Sin has surprised us, so will punish-
ment.

Mertoun. No—me alone, who sinned alone !

Mildred.

The night

You likened our past life to—was it storm
Throughout to you then, Henry ?

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

That should spirt water, and spouts blood. I'll not . . . Henry, you do not wish that I should draw This vengeance down? I'll not affect a grace That's gone from me—gone once, and gone for ever!

425

Mertoun. Mildred, my honour is your own. I'll share

Disgrace I cannot suffer by myself.

A word informs your brother I retract

This morning's offer; time will yet bring forth

Some better way of saving both of us.

430

Mildred. I'll meet their faces, Henry!

Mertoun. When? to-morrow!

Get done with it!

Mildred. Oh, Henry, not to-morrow!

Next day! I never shall prepare my words

And looks and gestures sooner.—How you must

Despise me!

Mertoun. Mildred, break it if you choose,

435

A heart the love of you uplifted—still

Uplifts, thro' this protracted agony,

To heaven! but Mildred, answer me,—first pace

The chamber with me—once again—now, say

Calmly the part, the . . . what it is of me

440

You see contempt (for you did say contempt)

—Contempt for you in! I would pluck it off

And cast it from me!—but no—no, you'll not

Repeat that?—will you, Mildred, repeat that?

Mildred. Dear Henry!

Mertoun. I was scarce a boy—e'en now

445

What am I more? And you were infantine

When first I met you; why, your hair fell loose

On either side! My fool's-cheek reddens now

Only in the recalling how it burned

That morn to see the shape of many a dream

450

—You know we boys are prodigal of charms

SCENE III A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

To her we dream of—I had heard of one,
 Had dreamed of her, and I was close to her,
 Might speak to her, might live and die her own,
 Who knew? I spoke. Oh, Mildred, feel you not 455
 That now, while I remember every glance
 Of yours, each word of yours, with power to test
 And weigh them in the diamond scales of pride,
 Resolved the treasure of a first and last
 Heart's love shall have been bartered at its worth, 460
 —That now I think upon your purity
 And utter ignorance of guilt—your own
 Or other's guilt—the girlish undisguised
 Delight at a strange novel prize—(I talk
 A silly language, but interpret, you!) 465
 If I, with fancy at its full, and reason
 Scarce in its germ, enjoined you secrecy,
 If you had pity on my passion, pity
 On my protested sickness of the soul
 To sit beside you, hear you breathe, and watch 470
 Your eyelids and the eyes beneath—if you
 Accorded gifts and knew not they were gifts—
 If I grew mad at last with enterprise
 And must behold my beauty in her bower
 Or perish—(I was ignorant of even 475
 My own desires—what then were you?) if sorrow—
 Sin—if the end came—must I now renounce
 My reason, blind myself to light, say truth
 Is false and lie to God and my own soul?
 Contempt were all of this!

Mildred. Do you believe . . . 480
 Or, Henry, I'll not wrong you—you believe
 That I was ignorant. I scarce grieve o'er
 The past. We'll love on; you will love me still.

Mertoun. Oh, to love less what one has injured!
 Dove,
 Whose pinion I have rashly hurt, my breast— 485

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT I

Shall my heart's warmth not nurse thee into strength?

Flower I have crushed, shall I not care for thee?
Bloom o'er my crest, my fight-mark and device!
Mildred, I love you and you love me.

Mildred.

Go!

Be that your last word. I shall sleep to-night. 490

Mertoun. This is not our last meeting?

Mildred.

One night more.

Mertoun. And then—think, then!

Mildred.

Then, no sweet courtship-days,

No dawning consciousness of love for us,

No strange and palpitating births of sense

From words and looks, no innocent fears and hopes, 495
Reserves and confidences: morning's over!

Mertoun. How else should love's perfected
... noontide follow? . . .

All the dawn promised shall the day perform.

Mildred. So may it be! but——

You are cautious, Love?

Are sure that unobserved you scaled the walls? 500

Mertoun. Oh, trust me! Then our final meet-
ing's fixed

To-morrow night?

Mildred. Farewell! Stay, Henry . . . where-
fore?

His foot is on the yew-tree bough; the turf

Receives him: now the moonlight as he runs

Embraces him—but he must go—is gone. 505

Ah, once again he turns—thanks, thanks, my Love!

He's gone. Oh, I'll believe him every word!

I was so young, I loved him so, I had

No mother, God forgot me, and I fell.

There may be pardon yet: all's doubt beyond. 510

Surely the bitterness of death is past.

ACT II

SCENE.—*The Library*

Enter Lord TRESHAM, hastily

Tresham. This way ! In, Gerard, quick !

[*As GERARD enters, TRESHAM secures the door.*

Now speak ! or, wait—
I 'll bid you speak directly. [*Seats himself.*

Now repeat

Firmly and circumstantially the tale

You just now told me ; it eludes me ; either

I did not listen, or the half is gone

Away from me. How long have you lived here ?

Here in my house, your father kept our woods
Before you ?

Gerard. —As his father did, my lord.
I have been eating, sixty years almost,
Your bread.

Tresham. Yes, yes. You ever were of all
The servants in my father's house, I know,
The trusted one. You 'll speak the truth.

Gerard. I 'll speak
God's truth. Night after night . . .

Tresham. Since when ?

Gerard. At least

A month—each midnight has some man access
To Lady Mildred's chamber.

Tresham. Tush, "access"—
No wide words like "access" to me !

Gerard. He runs

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT II

Along the woodside, crosses to the South,
Takes the left tree that ends the avenue . . .

Tresham. The last great yew-tree?

Gerard. You might stand upon
The main boughs like a platform. Then he . . .

Tresham. Quick! 20

Gerard. Climbs up, and, where they lessen at
the top,

—I cannot see distinctly, but he throws,
I think—for this I do not vouch—a line
That reaches to the lady's casement—

Tresham. —Which

He enters not! Gerard, some wretched fool 25
Dares pry into my sister's privacy!

When such are young, it seems a precious thing
To have approached,—to merely have approached,
Got sight of, the abode of her they set
Their frantic thoughts upon. He does not enter? 30
Gerard?

Gerard. There is a lamp that's full i' the midst,
Under a red square in the painted glass
Of Lady Mildred's . . .

Tresham. Leave that name out! Well?
That lamp?

Gerard. —Is moved at midnight higher up
To one pane—a small dark-blue pane; he waits 35
For that among the boughs: at sight of that,
I see him, plain as I see you, my lord,
Open the lady's casement, enter there . . .

Tresham. —And stay?

Gerard. An hour, two hours.

Tresham. And this you saw

Once?—twice?—quick!

Gerard. Twenty times.

Tresham. And what brings you 40

Under the yew-trees?

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT II

Tresham.

No—

No, Gerard!

Gerard. Let me go!

Tresham.

A man, you say :

What man? Young? Not a vulgar hind?

What dress?

Gerard. A slouched hat and a large dark foreign cloak

Wraps his whole form ; even his face is hid ; 75

But I should judge him young : no hind, be sure !

Tresham. Why?

Gerard. He is ever armed : his sword projects Beneath the cloak.

Tresham. Gerard,—I will not say

No word, no breath of this !

Gerard. Thanks, thanks, my lord ! [*Goes.*

Tresham [*paces the room. After a pause*]. Oh, thought 's absurd !—as with some monstrous fact 80

Which, when ill thoughts beset us, seems to give

Merciful God that made the sun and stars,

The waters and the green delights of earth,

The lie ! I apprehend the monstrous fact—

Yet know the maker of all worlds is good, 85

And yield my reason up, inadequate

To reconcile what yet I do behold—

Blasting my sense ! There 's cheerful day outside :

This is my library, and this the chair

My father used to sit in carelessly 90

After his soldier-fashion, while I stood

Between his knees to question him : and here

Gerard our grey retainer,—as he says,

Fed with our food, from sire to son, an age,—

Has told a story—I am to believe ! 95

That Mildred . . . oh, no, no ! both tales are true,

Her pure cheek's story and the forester's !

ACT II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Would she, or could she, err—much less, confound
 All guilts of treachery, of craft, of . . . Heaven
 Keep me within its hand!—I will sit here 100
 Until thought settle and I see my course.
 Avert, oh God, only this woe from me!

*[As he sinks his head between his arms on
 the table, GUENDOLEN'S voice is heard at
 the door.]*

Lord Tresham! *[She knocks.]* Is Lord Tresham
 there?

*[TRESHAM, hastily turning, pulls down the
 first book above him and opens it.]*

Tresham. Come in! *[She enters.]*

Ha, Guendolen!—good morning.

Guendolen. Nothing more?

Tresham. What should I say more?

Guendolen. Pleasant question! more? 105

This more. Did I besiege poor Mildred's brain
 Last night till close on morning with "the Earl,"
 "The Earl"—whose worth did I asseverate
 Till I am very fain to hope that . . . Thorold,
 What is all this? You are not well!

Tresham. Who, I? 110

You laugh at me.

Guendolen. Has what I 'm fain to hope,
 Arrived then? Does that huge tome show some
 blot

In the Earl's 'scutcheon come no longer back
 Than Arthur's time?

Tresham. When left you Mildred's chamber?

Guendolen. Oh, late enough, I told you! The
 main thing 115

To ask is, how I left her chamber,—sure,
 Content yourself, she 'll grant this paragon
 Of Earls no such ungracious . . .

Tresham. Send her here!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT II

Guendolen. Thorold?

Tresham. I mean—acquaint her, Guendolen,
—But mildly!

Guendolen. Mildly?

Tresham. Ah, you guessed aright! 120
I am not well: there is no hiding it.

But tell her I would see her at her leisure—

That is, at once! here in the library!

The passage in that old Italian book

We hunted for so long is found, say, found— 125

And if I let it slip again . . . you see,

That she must come—and instantly!

Guendolen. I 'll die
Piecemeal, record that, if there have not gloomed
Some blot i' the 'scutcheon!

Tresham. Go! or, Guendolen,
Be you at call,—with Austin, if you choose,— 130
In the adjoining gallery! There, go!

[GUENDOLEN goes.]

Another lesson to me! You might bid

A child disguise his heart's sore, and conduct

Some sly investigation point by point

With a smooth brow, as well as bid me catch 135

The inquisitorial cleverness some praise.

If you had told me yesterday, "There 's one

"You needs must circumvent and practise with,

"Entrap by policies, if you would worm

"The truth out: and that one is—Mildred!"

There,

There—reasoning is thrown away on it! 140

Prove she's unchaste . . . why, you may after prove

That she 's a poisoner, traitress, what you will!

Where I can comprehend nought, nought's to say.

Or do, or think. Force on me but the first 145

Abomination,—then outpour all plagues,

And I shall ne'er make count of them.

Enter MILDRED

Mildred.

What book

Is it I wanted, Thorold? Guendolen

Thought you were pale ; you are not pale. That
book ?

That 's Latin surely.

Tresham.

Mildred, here 's a line,

150

(Don't lean on me : I 'll English it for you)

“Love conquers all things.” What love conquers them?

What love should you esteem—best love?

Mildred.

True love.

Tresham. I mean, and should have said, whose
love is best

Of all that love or that profess to love?

155

Mildred. The list 's so long: there 's father's,
mother's, husband's . . .

Tresham. Mildred, I do believe a brother's love

For a sole sister must exceed them all.

For see now, only see ! there 's no alloy

Of earth that creeps into the perfect'st gold

160

Of other loves—no gratitude to claim ;

You never gave her life, not even aught

That keeps life—never tended her, instructed,

Enriched her—so, your love can claim no right

O'er her save pure love's claim: that 's what I call 165

165

Freedom from earthliness. You 'll never hope

To be such friends, for instance, she and you,

As when you hunted cowslips in the woods

Or played together in the meadow hay.

Oh yes—with age, respect comes, and your worth 170

170

Is felt, there's growing sympathy of tastes,

There 's ripened friendship, there 's confirmed
esteem :

—Much head these make against the new-comer !
 The startling apparition, the strange youth—
 Whom one half-hour's conversing with, or, say, 175
 Mere gazing at, shall change (beyond all change
 This Ovid ever sang about) your soul
 . . . Her soul, that is,—the sister's soul ! With her
 'T was winter yesterday ; now, all is warmth,
 The green leaf's springing and the turtle's voice, 180
 " Arise and come away ! " Come whither ?—far
 Enough from the esteem, respect, and all
 The brother's somewhat insignificant
 Array of rights ! All which he knows before,
 Has calculated on so long ago ! 185
 I think such love, (apart from yours and mine,)
 Contented with its little term of life,
 Intending to retire betimes, aware
 How soon the background must be place for it,
 —I think, am sure, a brother's love exceeds 190
 All the world's love in its unworldliness.

Mildred. What is this for ?

Tresham. This, Mildred, is it for !

Or, no, I cannot go to it so soon !
 That 's one of many points my haste left out—
 Each day, each hour throws forth its silk-slight film 195
 Between the being tied to you by birth,
 And you, until those slender threads compose
 A web that shrouds her daily life of hopes
 And fears and fancies, all her life, from yours :
 So close you live and yet so far apart ! 200
 And must I rend this web, tear up, break down
 The sweet and palpitating mystery
 That makes her sacred ? You—for you I mean,
 Shall I speak, shall I not speak ?

Mildred.

Speak !

Tresham.

I will.

Is there a story men could—any man

205

ACT II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Could tell of you, you would conceal from me?

I 'll never think there 's falsehood on that lip.

Say "There is no such story men could tell,"

And I 'll believe you, though I disbelieve

The world—the world of better men than I, 210

And women such as I suppose you. Speak!

[*After a pause.*] Not speak? Explain then! Clear
it up then! Move

Some of the miserable weight away

That presses lower than the grave! Not speak?

Some of the dead weight, Mildred! Ah, if I 215

Could bring myself to plainly make their charge

Against you! Must I, Mildred? Silent still?

[*After a pause.*] Is there a gallant that has night
by night

Admittance to your chamber?

[*After a pause.*] Then, his name!

Till now, I only had a thought for you : 220

But now,—his name!

Mildred. Thorold, do you devise

Fit expiation for my guilt, if fit

There be! 'T is nought to say that I 'll endure

And bless you,—that my spirit yearns to purge

Her stains off in the fierce renewing fire : 225

But do not plunge me into other guilt!

Oh, guilt enough! I cannot tell his name.

Tresham. Then judge yourself! How should I
act? Pronounce!

Mildred. Oh, Thorold, you must never tempt
me thus!

To die here in this chamber by that sword 230

Would seem like punishment: so should I glide,

Like an arch-cheat, into extremest bliss!

'T were easily arranged for me : but you—

What would become of you?

Tresham.

And what will now

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT II

Become of me? I'll hide your shame and mine 235
 From every eye; the dead must heave their hearts
 Under the marble of our chapel-floor;
 They cannot rise and blast you. You may wed
 Your paramour above our mother's tomb;
 Our mother cannot move from 'neath your foot. 240
 We too will somehow wear this one day out:
 But with to-morrow hastens here—the Earl!
 The youth without suspicion face can come
 From Heaven, and heart from . . . whence pro-
 ceed such hearts?

I have despatched last night at your command 245
 A missive bidding him present himself
 To-morrow—here—thus much is said; the rest
 Is understood as if 't were written down—
 “His suit finds favour in your eyes.” Now dictate
 This morning's letter that shall countermand 250
 Last night's—do dictate that!

Mildred. But, Thorold—if

I will receive him as I said?

Tresham. The Earl?

Mildred. I will receive him.

Tresham [*starting up*]. Ho there! Guendolen!

GUENDOLEN and AUSTIN enter

And, Austin, you are welcome, too! Look there!
 The woman there!

Austin and Guendolen. How? Mildred?

Tresham. Mildred once! 255

Now the receiver night by night, when sleep
 Blesses the inmates of her father's house,
 —I say, the soft sly wanton that receives
 Her guilt's accomplice 'neath this roof which holds
 You, Guendolen, you, Austin, and has held 260
 A thousand Treshams—never one like her!
 No lighter of the signal-lamp her quick

ACT II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Foul breath near quenches in hot eagerness
 To mix with breath as foul ! no loosener
 O' the lattice, practised in the stealthy tread, 265
 The low voice and the noiseless come-and-go !
 Not one composer of the bacchant's mien
 Into—what you thought Mildred's, in a word !
 Know her !

Guendolen. Oh, Mildred, look to me, at least !
 Thorold—she 's dead, I 'd say, but that she stands 270
 Rigid as stone and whiter !

Tresham. You have heard . . .

Guendolen. Too much ! You must proceed no
 further.

Mildred. Yes—

Proceed ! All 's truth. Go from me !

Tresham. All is truth,
 She tells you ! Well, you know, or ought to know,
 All this I would forgive in her. I 'd con 275
 Each precept the harsh world enjoins, I 'd take
 Our ancestors' stern verdicts one by one,
 I 'd bind myself before them to exact
 The prescribed vengeance—and one word of hers,
 The sight of her, the bare least memory 280
 Of Mildred, my one sister, my heart's pride
 Above all prides, my all in all so long,
 Would scatter every trace of my resolve.
 What were it silently to waste away
 And see her waste away from this day forth, 285
 Two scathed things with leisure to repent,
 And grow acquainted with the grave, and die
 Tired out if not at peace, and be forgotten ?
 It were not so impossible to bear.
 But this—that, fresh from last night's pledge re-
 newed 290

Of love with the successful gallant there,
 She calmly bids me help her to entice,

Inveigle an unconscious trusting youth
 Whothinksher all that's chaste and good and pure,
 —Invites me to betray him . . . who so fit 295
 As honour's self to cover shame's arch-deed?
 —That she 'll receive Lord Mertoun—(her own
 phrase)—

This, who could bear? Why, you have heard of
 thieves,
 Stabbers, the earth's disgrace, who yet have laughed,
 "Talk not to me of torture—I 'll betray 300
 "No comrade I've pledged faith to!"—you have
 heard

Of wretched women—all but Mildreds—tied
 By wild illicit ties to losels vile
 You'd tempt them to forsake; and they 'll reply
 "Gold, friends, repute, I left for him, I find 305
 "In him, why should I leave him then for gold,
 "Repute or friends?"—and you have felt your
 heart

Respond to such poor outcasts of the world
 As to so many friends; bad as you please,
 You've felt they were God's men and women still, 310
 So, not to be disowned by you. But she
 That stands there, calmly gives her lover up
 As means to wed the Earl that she may hide
 Their intercourse the surelier: and, for this,
 I curse her to her face before you all. 315

Shame hunt her from the earth! Then Heaven
 do right

To both! It hears me now—shall judge her then!

[As MILDRED faints and falls, TRESHAM
 rushes out.

Austin. Stay, Tresham, we 'll accompany you!
Guendolen. We?

What, and leave Mildred? We? Why, where's
 my place

ACT II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

But by her side, and where yours but by mine? 320
Mildred—one word! Only look at me, then!

Austin. No, Guendolen! I echo Thorold's voice.
She is unworthy to behold . . .

Guendolen. Us two?

If you spoke on reflection, and if I
Approved your speech—if you (to put the thing 325
At lowest) you the soldier, bound to make
The king's cause yours and fight for it, and throw
Regard to others of its right or wrong,
—If with a death-white woman you can help,
Let alone sister, let alone a Mildred, 330
You left her—or if I, her cousin, friend
This morning, playfellow but yesterday,
Who said, or thought at least a thousand times,
“I'd serve you if I could,” should now face round
And say, “Ah, that's to only signify 335
“I'd serve you while you're fit to serve yourself :
“So long as fifty eyes await the turn
“Of yours to forestall its yet half-formed wish,
“I'll proffer my assistance you'll not need—
“When every tongue is praising you, I'll join 340
“The praisers' chorus—when you're hemmed about
“With lives between you and detraction—lives
“To be laid down if a rude voice, rash eye,
“Rough hand should violate the sacred ring
“Their worship throws about you,—then indeed, 345
“Who'll stand up for you stout as I?” If so
We said, and so we did,—not Mildred there
Would be unworthy to behold us both,
But we should be unworthy, both of us,
To be beheld by—by—your meanest dog, 350
Which, if that sword were broken in your face
Before a crowd, that badge torn off your breast,
And you cast out with hooting and contempt,
—Would push his way thro' all the hooters, gain

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT II

Your side, go off with you and all your shame 355
To the next ditch you choose to die in ! Austin,
Do you love me ? Here 's Austin, Mildred,—
here 's

Your brother says he does not believe half—
No, nor half that—of all he heard ! He says,
Look up and take his hand !

Austin. Look up and take 360

My hand, dear Mildred !

Mildred. I—I was so young !

Beside, I loved him, Thorold—and I had
No mother ; God forgot me : so, I fell.

Guendolen. Mildred !

Mildred. Require no further ! Did I dream
That I could palliate what is done ? All 's true. 365
Now, punish me ! A woman takes my hand ?
Let go my hand ! You do not know, I see.
I thought that Thorold told you.

Guendolen. What is this ?

Where start you to ?

Mildred. Oh, Austin, loosen me !

You heard the whole of it—your eyes were worse, 370
In their surprise, than Thorold's ! Oh, unless
You stay to execute his sentence, loose
My hand ! Has Thorold gone, and are you here ?

Guendolen. Here, Mildred, we two friends of
yours will wait

Your bidding ; be you silent, sleep or muse ! 375

Only, when you shall want your bidding done,
How can we do it if we are not by ?

Here 's Austin waiting patiently your will !

One spirit to command, and one to love

And to believe in it and do its best, 380

Poor as that is, to help it—why, the world
Has been won many a time, its length and breadth,
By just such a beginning !

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT II

Guendolen. But you said
You would receive his suit in spite of this?

Mildred. I say there is a cloud . . .

Guendolen. No cloud to me !
Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same !

Mildred. What maddest fancy . . .

Guendolen [*calling aloud*]. Austin ! (spare your
pains— 410

When I have got a truth, that truth I keep)—

Mildred. By all you love, sweet *Guendolen*,
forbear !

Have I confided in you . . .

Guendolen. Just for this !
Austin !—Oh, not to guess it at the first !

But I did guess it—that is, I divined, 415

Felt by an instinct how it was : why else
Should I pronounce you free from all that heap
Of sins which had been irredeemable ?

I felt they were not yours—what other way
Than this, not yours? The secret 's wholly mine! 420

Mildred. If you would see me die before his
face . . .

Guendolen. I 'd hold my peace ! And if the
Earl returns
To-night ?

Mildred. Ah Heaven, he 's lost !

Guendolen. I thought so. Austin !

Enter AUSTIN

Oh, where have you been hiding ?

Austin. Thorold 's gone,
I know not how, across the meadow-land. 425

I watched him till I lost him in the skirts

O' the beech-wood.

Guendolen. Gone? All thwarts us.

Mildred. Thorold too?

ACT II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Guendolen. I have thought. First lead this
Mildred to her room.

Go on the other side ; and then we 'll seek
Your brother : and I 'll tell you, by the way,
The greatest comfort in the world. You said
There was a clue to all. Remember, Sweet,
He said there was a clue ! I hold it. Come !

430

ACT III

SCENE I.—*The end of the Yew-tree Avenue under
MILDRED'S window. A light seen through a
central red pane*

Enter TRESHAM through the trees

Again here ! But I cannot lose myself.
The heath—the orchard—I have traversed glades
And dells and bosky paths which used to lead
Into green wild-wood depths, bewildering
My boy's adventurous step. And now they tend 5
Hither or soon or late ; the blackest shade
Breaks up, the thronged trunks of the trees ope wide,
And the dim turret I have fled from, fronts
Again my step ; the very river put
Its arm about me and conducted me 10
To this detested spot. Why then, I 'll shun
Their will no longer : do your will with me !
Oh, bitter ! To have reared a towering scheme
Of happiness, and to behold it razed,
Were nothing : all men hope, and see their hopes 15
Frustrate, and grieve awhile, and hope anew.
But I . . . to hope that from a line like ours
No horrid prodigy like this would spring,
Were just as though I hoped that from these old
Confederates against the sovereign day, 20
Children of older and yet older sires,
Whose living coral berries dropped, as now
On me, on many a baron's surcoat once,

SCENE I A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

On many a beauty's whimple—would proceed
No poison-tree, to thrust, from hell its root, 25
Hither and thither its strange snaky arms.

Why came I here? What must I do? [*A bell strikes.*] A bell?

Midnight! and 't is at midnight . . . Ah, I catch
—Woods, river, plains, I catch your meaning now,
And I obey you! Hist! This tree will serve. 30

[*He retires behind one of the trees. After a pause, enter MERTOUN cloaked as before.*

Mertoun. Not time! Beat out thy last voluptuous beat

Of hope and fear, my heart! I thought the clock
I' the chapel struck as I was pushing through
The ferns. And so I shall no more see rise
My love-star! Oh, no matter for the past! 35

So much the more delicious task to watch
Mildred revive: to pluck out, thorn by thorn,
All traces of the rough forbidden path
My rash love lured her to! Each day must see
Some fear of hers effaced, some hope renewed: 40
Then there will be surprises, unforeseen
Delights in store. I'll not regret the past.

[*The light is placed above in the purple pane.*

And see, my signal rises, Mildred's star!
I never saw it lovelier than now
It rises for the last time. If it sets, 45
'T is that the re-assuring sun may dawn.

[*As he prepares to ascend the last tree of the avenue, TRESHAM arrests his arm.*

Unhand me—peasant, by your grasp! Here 's
gold.

'T was a mad freak of mine. I said I 'd pluck
A branch from the white-blossomed shrub beneath
The casement there. Take this, and hold your
peace. 50

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT III

Tresham. Into the moonlight yonder, come with me!

Out of the shadow!

Mertoun. I am armed, fool!

Tresham. Yes,

Or no? You'll come into the light, or no?

My hand is on your throat—refuse!—

Mertoun. That voice!

Where have I heard . . . no—that was mild and slow.

I'll come with you. [*They advance.*]

Tresham. You're armed: that's well. Declare Your name: who are you?

Mertoun. (Tresham!—she is lost!)

Tresham. Oh, silent? Do you know, you bear yourself

Exactly as, in curious dreams I've had
How felons, this wild earth is full of, look

When they're detected, still your kind has looked!

The bravo holds an assured countenance,

The thief is voluble and plausible,

But silently the slave of lust has crouched

When I have fancied it before a man.

Your name!

Mertoun. I do conjure Lord Tresham—ay,
Kissing his foot, if so I might prevail—

That he for his own sake forbear to ask

My name! As heaven's above, his future weal

Or woe depends upon my silence! Vain!

I read your white inexorable face.

Know me, Lord Tresham!

[*He throws off his disguises.*]

Tresham.

Mertoun!

[*After a pause.*] Draw now!

Mertoun.

Hear me

But speak first!

SCENE I A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Tresham. Not one least word on your life !
 Be sure that I will strangle in your throat
 The least word that informs me how you live 75
 And yet seem what you seem ! No doubt 't was you
 Taught Mildred still to keep that face and sin.
 We should join hands in frantic sympathy
 If you once taught me the unteachable,
 Explained how you can live so, and so lie. 80
 With God's help I retain, despite my sense,
 The old belief—a life like yours is still
 Impossible. Now draw !

Mertoun. Not for my sake,
 Do I entreat a hearing—for your sake,
 And most for her sake !

Tresham. Ha ha, what should I 85
 Know of your ways ? A miscreant like yourself,
 How must one rouse his ire ? A blow ?—that 's
 pride
 No doubt, to him ! One spurns him, does one not ?
 Or sets the foot upon his mouth, or spits
 Into his face ! Come ! Which, or all of these ? 90

Mertoun. 'Twixt him and me and Mildred,
 Heaven be judge !
 Can I avoid this ? Have your will, my lord !

[He draws and, after a few passes, falls.]

Tresham. You are not hurt ?

Mertoun. You 'll hear me now !

Tresham. But rise !

Mertoun. Ah, Tresham, say I not “you 'll hear
 me now !”

And what procures a man the right to speak 95
 In his defence before his fellow man,
 But—I suppose—the thought that presently
 He may have leave to speak before his God
 His whole defence ?

Tresham. Not hurt ? It cannot be !

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT III

You made no effort to resist me. Where 100
 Did my sword reach you? Why not have returned
 My thrusts? Hurt where?

Mertoun.

My lord—

Tresham.

How young he is!

Mertoun. Lord Tresham, I am very young, and
 yet

I have entangled other lives with mine.

Do let me speak, and do believe my speech! 105

That when I die before you presently,—

Tresham. Can you stay here till I return with
 help?

Mertoun. Oh, stay by me! When I was less
 than boy

I did you grievous wrong and knew it not—

Upon my honour, knew it not! Once known, 110

I could not find what seemed a better way

To right you than I took: my life—you feel

How less than nothing were the giving you

The life you've taken! But I thought my way

The better—only for your sake and hers: 115

And as you have decided otherwise,

Would I had an infinity of lives

To offer you! Now say—instruct me—think!

Can you, from the brief minutes I have left,

Eke out my reparation? Oh think—think! 120

For I must wring a partial—dare I say,

Forgiveness from you, ere I die?

Tresham.

I do

Forgive you.

Mertoun. Wait and ponder that great word!

Because, if you forgive me, I shall hope

To speak to you of—Mildred!

Tresham.

Mertoun, haste 125

And anger have undone us. 'T is not you

Should tell me for a novelty you're young,

SCENE I A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Thoughtless, unable to recall the past.

Be but your pardon ample as my own !

Mertoun. Ah, Tresham, that a sword-stroke and
a drop

130

Of blood or two, should bring all this about !

Why, 't was my very fear of you, my love

Of you—(what passion like a boy's for one

Like you?)—that ruined me ! I dreamed of you—

You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,

135

The scholar and the gentleman. I burned

To knit myself to you : but I was young,

And your surpassing reputation kept me

So far aloof ! Oh, wherefore all that love ?

With less of love, my glorious yesterday

140

Of praise and gentlest words and kindest looks,

Had taken place perchance six months ago.

Even now, how happy we had been ! And yet

I know the thought of this escaped you, Tresham !

Let me look up into your face ; I feel

145

'T is changed above me : yet my eyes are glazed.

Where ? where ?

*[As he endeavours to raise himself, his eye
catches the lamp.]*

Ah, Mildred ! What will Mildred do ?

Tresham, her life is bound up in the life

That 's bleeding fast away ! I 'll live—must live,

There, if you 'll only turn me I shall live

150

And save her ! Tresham—oh, had you but heard !

Had you but heard ! What right was yours to
set

The thoughtless foot upon her life and mine,

And then say, as we perish, " Had I thought,

" All had gone otherwise " ? We 've sinned and
die :

155

Never you sin, Lord Tresham ! for you 'll die,

And God will judge you.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT III

Tresham.

Yes, be satisfied !

That process is begun.

Mertoun.

And she sits there

Waiting for me ! Now, say you this to her—

You, not another—say, I saw him die

As he breathed this, “I love her”—you don't
know

160

What those three small words mean ! Say, loving
her

Lowers me down the bloody slope to death

With memories . . . I speak to her, not you,

Who had no pity, will have no remorse,

Perchance intend her . . . Die along with me,

165

Dear Mildred ! 't is so easy, and you 'll 'scape

So much unkindness ! Can I lie at rest,

With rude speech spoken to you, ruder deeds

Done to you?—heartless men shall have my heart,

170

And I tied down with grave-clothes and the worm,

Aware, perhaps, of every blow—oh God !—

Upon those lips—yet of no power to tear

The felon stripe by stripe ! Die, Mildred ! Leave

Their honourable world to them ! For God

175

We 're good enough, though the world casts us
out.

[*A whistle is heard.*]

Tresham. Ho, Gerard !

Enter GERARD, AUSTIN and GUENDOLEN, with lights

No one speak ! You see what 's done.

I cannot bear another voice.

Mertoun.

There 's light—

Light all about me, and I move to it.

Tresham, did I not tell you—did you not

180

Just promise to deliver words of mine

To Mildred ?

Tresham. I will bear those words to her.

Mertoun. Now ?

SCENE I A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Tresham. Now. Lift you the body, and leave me
The head.

*[As they have half raised MERTOUN, he
turns suddenly.]*

Mertoun. I knew they turned me : turn me not
from her !

There ! stay you ! there ! *[Dies.]*

Guendolen *[after a pause]*. Austin, remain you
here

With Thorold until Gerard comes with help :
Then lead him to his chamber. I must go
To Mildred.

Tresham. Guendolen, I hear each word
You utter. Did you hear him bid me give
His message ? Did you hear my promise ? I,
And only I, see Mildred.

Guendolen. She will die.

Tresham. Oh no, she will not die ! I dare not
hope

She 'll die. What ground have you to think
she 'll die ?

Why, Austin 's with you !

Austin. Had we but arrived

Before you fought !

Tresham. There was no fight at all.

He let me slaughter him—the boy ! I 'll trust
The body there to you and Gerard—thus !
Now bear him on before me.

Austin. Whither bear him ?

Tresham. Oh, to my chamber ! When we meet
there next,

We shall be friends.

[They bear out the body of MERTOUN.]

Will she die, Guendolen ?

Guendolen. Where are you taking me ?

Tresham. He fell just here.

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT III

Now answer me. Shall you in your whole life
 —You who have nought to do with Mertoun's fate,
 Now you have seen his breast upon the turf, 205
 Shall you e'er walk this way if you can help?
 When you and Austin wander arm-in-arm
 Through our ancestral grounds, will not a shade
 Be ever on the meadow and the waste—
 Another kind of shade than when the night 210
 Shuts the woodside with all its whispers up?
 But will you ever so forget his breast
 As carelessly to cross this bloody turf
 Under the black yew avenue? That's well!
 You turn your head: and I then?—

Guendolen. What is done 215

Is done. My care is for the living. Thorold,
 Bear up against this burden: more remains
 To set the neck to!

Tresham. Dear and ancient trees
 My fathers planted, and I loved so well!
 What have I done that, like some fabled crime 220
 Of yore, lets loose a Fury leading thus
 Her miserable dance amidst you all?
 Oh, never more for me shall winds intone
 With all your tops a vast antiphony,
 Demanding and responding in God's praise! 225
 Hers ye are now, not mine! Farewell—farewell!

SCENE II.—MILDRED'S *chamber*. MILDRED *alone*

He comes not! I have heard of those who seemed
 Resourceless in prosperity,—you thought
 Sorrow might slay them when she listed; yet
 Did they so gather up their diffused strength 230
 At her first menace, that they bade her strike,
 And stood and laughed her subtlest skill to scorn

SCENE II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Oh, 't is not so with me! The first woe fell,
 And the rest fall upon it, not on me :
 Else should I bear that Henry comes not?—fails 235
 Just this first night out of so many nights?
 Loving is done with. Were he sitting now,
 As so few hours since, on that seat, we 'd love
 No more—contrive no thousand happy ways
 To hide love from the loveless, any more. 240
 I think I might have urged some little point
 In my defence, to Thorold; he was breathless
 For the least hint of a defence: but no,
 The first shame over, all that would might fall.
 No Henry! Yet I merely sit and think 245
 The morn's deed o'er and o'er. I must have crept
 Out of myself. A Mildred that has lost
 Her lover—oh, I dare not look upon
 Such woe! I crouch away from it! 'T is she,
 Mildred, will break her heart, not I! The world 250
 Forsakes me: only Henry's left me—left?
 When I have lost him, for he does not come,
 And I sit stupidly . . . Oh Heaven, break up
 This worse than anguish, this mad apathy,
 By any means or any messenger! 255

Tresham [*without*]. Mildred!

Mildred. Come in! Heaven hears me!
 [*Enter TRESHAM*]. You? alone?

Oh, no more cursing!

Tresham. Mildred, I must sit.

There—you sit!

Mildred. Say it, Thorold—do not look
 The curse! deliver all you come to say!
 What must become of me? Oh, speak that thought 260
 Which makes your brow and cheeks so pale!

Tresham. My thought?

Mildred. All of it!

Tresham. How we waded—years ago—

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT III

After those water-lilies, till the plash,
 I know not how, surprised us ; and you dared
 Neither advance nor turn back : so, we stood 265
 Laughing and crying until Gerard came—
 Once safe upon the turf, the loudest too,
 For once more reaching the relinquished prize !
 How idle thoughts are, some men's, dying men's !
 Mildred,—

Mildred. You call me kindlier by my name 270
 Than even yesterday : what is in that ?

Tresham. It weighs so much upon my mind that I
 This morning took an office not my own !
 I might . . . of course, I must be glad or grieved,
 Content or not, at every little thing 275
 That touches you. I may with a wrung heart
 Even reprove you, Mildred ; I did more :
 Will you forgive me ?

Mildred. Thorold ? do you mock ?
 Or no . . . and yet you bid me . . . say that word !

Tresham. Forgive me, Mildred !—are you silent,
 Sweet ? 280

Mildred [*starting up*]. Why does not Henry
 Mertoun come to-night ?
 Are you, too, silent ?

[*Dashing his mantle aside, and pointing to his
 scabbard, which is empty.*

Ah, this speaks for you !
 You've murdered Henry Mertoun ! Now proceed !
 What is it I must pardon ? This and all ?
 Well, I do pardon you—I think I do. 285
 Thorold, how very wretched you must be !

Tresham. He bade me tell you . . .

Mildred. What I do forbid
 Your utterance of ! So much that you may tell
 And will not—how you murdered him . . . but, no !
 You'll tell me that he loved me, never more 290

SCENE II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Than bleeding out his life there : must I say
 "Indeed," to that? Enough! I pardon you.

Tresham. You cannot, Mildred! for the harsh
 words, yes :

Of this last deed Another's judge : whose doom
 I wait in doubt, despondency and fear.

295

Mildred. Oh, true! There's nought for me to
 pardon! True!

You loose my soul of all its cares at once.

Death makes me sure of him for ever! You

Tell me his last words? He shall tell me them,

And take my answer—not in words, but reading 300

Himself the heart I had to read him late,

Which death . . .

Tresham. Death? You are dying too? Well said
 Of Guendolen! I dared not hope you'd die :
 But she was sure of it.

Mildred.

Tell Guendolen

I loved her, and tell Austin . . .

Tresham.

Him you loved : 305

And me?

Mildred. Ah, Thorold! Was't not rashly done
 To quench that blood, on fire with youth and hope

And love of me—whom you loved too, and yet

Suffered to sit here waiting his approach

While you were slaying him? Oh, doubtlessly 310

You let him speak his poor confused boy's-speech

—Do his poor utmost to disarm your wrath

And respite me!—you let him try to give

The story of our love and ignorance,

And the brief madness and the long despair— 315

You let him plead all this, because your code

Of honour bids you hear before you strike :

But at the end, as he looked up for life

Into your eyes—you struck him down!

Tresham.

No! No!

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT III

Had I but heard him—had I let him speak 320
 Half the truth—less—had I looked long on him
 I had desisted! Why, as he lay there,
 The moon on his flushed cheek, I gathered all
 The story ere he told it: I saw through
 The troubled surface of his crime and yours 325
 A depth of purity immovable,
 Had I but glanced, where all seemed turbidest
 Had gleamed some inlet to the calm beneath;
 I would not glance: my punishment 's at hand.
 There, Mildred, is the truth! and you—say on— 330
 You curse me?

Mildred. As I dare approach that Heaven
 Which has not bade a living thing despair,
 Which needs no code to keep its grace from stain,
 But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
 Desist and be forgiven,—I—forgive not, 335
 But bless you, Thorold, from my soul of souls!
 [*Falls on his neck.*]

There! Do not think too much upon the past!
 The cloud that 's broke was all the same a cloud
 While it stood up between my friend and you;
 You hurt him 'neath its shadow: but is that 340
 So past retrieve? I have his heart, you know;
 I may dispose of it: I give it you!
 It loves you as mine loves! Confirm me, Henry!
 [*Dies.*]

Tresham. I wish thee joy, Beloved! I am glad
 In thy full gladness!

Guendolen [*without*]. Mildred! Tresham!
 [*Entering with AUSTIN.*] Thorold, 345
 I could desist no longer. Ah, she swoons!
 That 's well.

Tresham. Oh, better far than that!

Guendolen. She 's dead!
 Let me unlock her arms!

SCENE II A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Tresham. She threw them thus
About my neck, and blessed me, and then died :
You 'll let them stay now, Guendolen !

Austin. Leave her 350
And look to him ! What ails you, Thorold ?

Guendolen. White
As she, and whiter ! Austin ! quick—this side !

Austin. A froth is oozing through his clenched
teeth ;
Both lips, where they 're not bitten through, are
black :

Speak, dearest Thorold !

Tresham. Something does weigh down 355
My neck beside her weight : thanks : I should fall
But for you, Austin, I believe !—there, there,
'T will pass away soon !—ah,—I had forgotten :
I am dying.

Guendolen. Thorold—Thorold—why was this ?

Tresham. I said, just as I drank the poison off, 360
The earth would be no longer earth to me,
The life out of all life was gone from me.
There are blind ways provided, the foredone
Heart-weary player in this pageant-world
Drops out by, letting the main masque defile 365
By the conspicuous portal : I am through—
Just through !

Guendolen. Don't leave him, Austin ! Death
is close.

Tresham. Already Mildred's face is peacefuller.
I see you, Austin—feel you : here 's my hand,
Put yours in it—you, Guendolen, yours too ! 370
You 're lord and lady now—you 're Treshams ;
name

And fame are yours : you hold our 'scutcheon up.
Austin, no blot on it ! You see how blood
Must wash one blot away : the first blot came

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON ACT III

And the first blood came. To the vain world's eye 375
All 's gules again : no care to the vain world,
From whence the red was drawn !

Austin. No blot shall come !

Tresham. I said that : yet it did come. Should
it come,
Vengeance is God's, not man's. Remember me !

[*Dies.*
Guendolen [*letting fall the pulseless arm*]. Ah,

Thorold, we can but—remember you ! 380

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

A PLAY

Ivy and violet, what do ye here
With blossom and shoot in the warm spring-weather,
Hiding the arms of Monchenci and Vere?—HANMER.

NO ONE LOVES AND HONOURS BARRY CORNWALL MORE THAN
DOES ROBERT BROWNING;
WHO, HAVING NOTHING BETTER THAN THIS PLAY TO
GIVE HIM IN PROOF OF IT,
MUST SAY SO.

LONDON: 1844.

PERSONS

COLOMBE OF RAVESTEIN, Duchess of Juliers and Cleves

SABYNE, ADOLF, *her attendants*

GUIBERT, GAUCELME, MAUFROY, CLUGNET, *courtiers*

VALENCE, *advocate of Cleves*

Prince BERTHOLD, *claimant of the Duchy*

MELCHIOR, *his confidant*

PLACE.—*The Palace at Juliers*

TIME, 16—

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

1844

ACT I

MORNING

SCENE.—*A corridor leading to the Audience-chamber*

GAUCELME, CLUGNET, MAUFROY *and other Courtiers,*
round GUIBERT, who is silently reading a paper:
as he drops it at the end—

Guibert. That this should be her birthday ; and
the day

We all invested her, twelve months ago,
As the late Duke's true heiress and our liege ;
And that this also must become the day . . .
Oh, miserable lady !

1st Courtier. Ay, indeed ?

2nd Courtier. Well, Guibert ?

3rd Courtier. But your news, my
friend, your news !

The sooner, friend, one learns Prince Berthold's
pleasure,

The better for us all : how writes the Prince ?
Give me ! I 'll read it for the common good.

Guibert. In time, sir,—but till time comes,
pardon me !

Our old Duke just disclosed his child's retreat,
Declared her true succession to his rule,

And died : this birthday was the day, last year,
We convoyed her from Castle Ravestein—
That sleeps out trustfully its extreme age 15
On the Meuse' quiet bank, where she lived queen
Over the water-buds,—to Juliers' court
With joy and bustle. Here again we stand ;
Sir Gaucelme's buckle 's constant to his cap :
To-day 's much such another sunny day ! 20

Gaucelme. Come, Guibert, this outgrows a jest,
I think !

You 're hardly such a novice as to need
The lesson, you pretend.

Guibert. What lesson, sir ?
That everybody, if he 'd thrive at court,
Should, first and last of all, look to himself ? 25
Why, no : and therefore with your good example,
(—Ho, Master Adolf !)—to myself I 'll look.

Enter ADOLF

Guibert. The Prince's letter ; why, of all men
else,
Comes it to me ?

Adolf. By virtue of your place,
Sir Guibert ! 'T was the Prince's express charge, 30
His envoy told us, that the missive there
Should only reach our lady by the hand
Of whosoever held your place.

Guibert. Enough !

[ADOLF *retires.*

Then, gentles, who 'll accept a certain poor
Indifferently honourable place, 35
My friends, I make no doubt, have gnashed their
teeth

At leisure minutes these half-dozen years,
To find me never in the mood to quit ?
Who asks may have it, with my blessing, and—

ACT I COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

This to present our lady. Who 'll accept? 40
 You,—you,—you? There it lies, and may, for
 me!

Maufroy [*a youth, picking up the paper, reads aloud*].

“Prince Berthold, proved by titles following
 “Undoubted Lord of Juliers, comes this day
 “To claim his own, with licence from the Pope,
 “The Emperor, the Kings of Spain and France” . . . 45

Gaucelme. Sufficient “titles following,” I judge!
 Don't read another! Well,—“to claim his own?”

Maufroy. “—And take possession of the Duchy
 held

“Since twelve months, to the true heir's prejudice,
 “By” . . . Colombe, Juliers' mistress, so she
 thinks, 50

And Ravestein's mere lady, as we find.

Who wants the place and paper? Guibert's right.
 I hope to climb a little in the world,—

I'd push my fortunes,—but, no more than he,
 Could tell her on this happy day of days, 55

That, save the nosegay in her hand, perhaps,
 There's nothing left to call her own. Sir Clugnet,
 You famish for promotion; what say you?

Clugnet [*an old man*]. To give this letter were a
 sort, I take it,

Of service: services ask recompense: 60
 What kind of corner may be Ravestein?

Guibert. The castle? Oh, you'd share her for-
 tunes? Good!

Three walls stand upright, full as good as four,
 With no such bad remainder of a roof.

Clugnet. Oh,—but the town?

Guibert. Five houses, fifteen huts; 65

A church whereto was once a spire, 't is judged;
 And half a dyke, except in time of thaw.

Clugnet. Still, there's some revenue?

Guibert.

Else Heaven forfend !

You hang a beacon out, should fogs increase ;
So, when the Autumn floats of pine-wood steer 70
Safe 'mid the white confusion, thanks to you,
Their grateful raftsmen flings a guilder in ;
—That 's if he mean to pass your way next time.

Clugnet. If not ?*Guibert.* Hang guilders, then ! He blesses you.*Clugnet.* What man do you suppose me ? Keep
your paper ! 75

And, let me say, it shows no handsome spirit
To dally with misfortune : keep your place !

Gaucelme. Some one must tell her.*Guibert.* Some one may : you may !

Gaucelme. Sir Guibert, 't is no trifle turns me sick
Of court-hypocrisy at years like mine, 80
But this goes near it. Where 's there news at all ?
Who 'll have the face, for instance, to affirm
He never heard, e'en while we crowned the girl,
That Juliers' tenure was by Salic law ;
That one, confessed her father's cousin's child, 85
And, she away, indisputable heir,
Against our choice protesting and the Duke's,
Claimed Juliers ?—nor, as he preferred his claim,
That first this, then another potentate,
Inclined to its allowance ?—I or you, 90
Or any one except the lady's self ?
Oh, it had been the direst cruelty
To break the business to her ! Things might change :
At all events, we 'd see next masque at end,
Next mummary over first : and so the edge 95
Was taken off sharp tidings as they came,
Till here 's the Prince upon us, and there 's she
—Wreathing her hair, a song between her lips,
With just the faintest notion possible
That some such claimant earns a livelihood 100

ACT I COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

About the world, by feigning grievances—
 Few pay the story of, but grudge its price,
 And fewer listen to, a second time.
 Your method proves a failure ; now try mine !
 And, since this must be carried . . .

Guibert [snatching the paper from him]. By your
 leave !

105

Your zeal transports you ! 'T will not serve the
 Prince

So much as you expect, this course you 'd take.

If she leaves quietly her palace,—well ;

But if she died upon its threshold,—no :

He 'd have the trouble of removing her.

110

Come, gentles, we 're all—what the devil knows !

You, Gaucelme, won't lose character, beside :

You broke your father's heart superiorly

To gather his succession—never blush !

You 're from my province, and, be comforted,

115

They tell of it with wonder to this day.

You can afford to let your talent sleep.

We 'll take the very worst supposed, as true :

There, the old Duke knew, when he hid his child

Among the river-flowers at Ravestein,

120

With whom the right lay ! Call the Prince our
 Duke !

There, she 's no Duchess, she 's no anything

More than a young maid with the bluest eyes :

And now, sirs, we 'll not break this young maid's
 heart

Coolly as Gaucelme could and would ! No haste !

125

His talent 's full-blown, ours but in the bud :

We 'll not advance to his perfection yet—

Will we, Sir Maufroy ? See, I 've ruined Maufroy

For ever as a courtier !

Gaucelme.

Here 's a coil !

And, count us, will you ? Count its residue,

130

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY ACT I

This boasted convoy, this day last year's crowd !
A birthday, too, a gratulation day !
I 'm dumb : bid that keep silence !

Maufroy and others. Eh, Sir Guibert ?

He 's right : that does say something : that 's bare truth.

Ten—twelve, I make : a perilous dropping off ! 135

Guibert. Pooh—is it audience hour ? The vestibule

Swarms too, I wager, with the common sort
That want our privilege of entry here.

Gaucelme. Adolf ! [*Re-enter ADOLF.*] Who 's outside ?

Guibert. Oh, your looks suffice !

Nobody waiting ?

Maufroy [*looking through the door-folds*]. Scarce our number !

Guibert. 'Sdeath ! 140

Nothing to beg for, to complain about ?

It can't be ! Ill news spreads, but not so fast
As thus to frighten all the world !

Gaucelme. The world

Lives out of doors, sir—not with you and me
By presence-chamber porches, state-room stairs, 145

Wherever warmth 's perpetual : outside 's free
To every wind from every compass-point,
And who may get nipped needs be weather-wise.

The Prince comes and the lady's People go ;
The snow-geese settles down, the swallows flee— 150
Why should they wait for winter-time ? 'T is in-
stinct.

Don't you feel somewhat chilly ?

Guibert. That 's their craft ?

And last year's crowders-round and criers-forth
That strewed the garlands, overarched the roads,
Lighted the bonfires, sang the loyal songs ! 155

ACT I COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Well 't is my comfort, you could never call me
 The People's Friend! The People keep their word—
 I keep my place : don't doubt I 'll entertain
 The People when the Prince comes, and the People
 Are talked of! Then, their speeches—no one
 tongue 160

Found respite, not a pen had holiday
 —For they wrote, too, as well as spoke, these
 knaves!

Now see : we tax and tithe them, pill and poll,
 They wince and fret enough, but pay they must
 —We manage that,—so, pay with a good grace 165
 They might as well, it costs so little more.

But when we 've done with taxes, meet folk next
 Outside the toll-booth and the rating-place,
 In public—there they have us if they will,
 We 're at their mercy after that, you see! 170

For one tax not ten devils could extort—
 Over and above necessity, a grace ;
 This prompt disbosoming of love, to wit—
 Their vine-leaf wrappage of our tribute penny,
 And crowding attestation, all works well. 175
 Yet this precisely do they thrust on us!
 These cappings quick, these crook-and-cringings
 low,

Hand to the heart, and forehead to the knee,
 With grin that shuts the eyes and opes the
 mouth—

So tender they their love ; and, tender made, 180
 Go home to curse us, the first doit we ask.
 As if their souls were any longer theirs!
 As if they had not given ample warrant
 To who should clap a collar on their neck,
 Rings in their nose, a goad to either flank, 185
 And take them for the brute they boast themselves!
 Stay—there 's a bustle at the outer door—

And somebody entreating . . . that 's my name !
 Adolf,—I heard my name !

Adolf. 'T was probably
 The suitor.

Guibert. Oh, there is one ?

Adolf. With a suit 190
 He 'd fain enforce in person.

Guibert. The good heart
 —And the greatfool! Just opethe mid-door's fold!
 Is that a lappet of his cloak, I see ?

Adolf. If it bear plenteous sign of travel . . . ay,
 The very cloak my comrades tore !

Guibert. Why tore ? 195

Adolf. He seeks the Duchess' presence in that
 trim :

Since daybreak, was he posted hereabouts
 Lest he should miss the moment.

Guibert. Where 's he now ?

Adolf. Gone for a minute possibly, not more :
 They have ado enough to thrust him back. 200

Guibert. Ay—but my name, I caught ?

Adolf. Oh, sir—he said
 —What was it?—You had known him formerly,
 And, he believed, would help him did you guess
 He waited now ; you promised him as much :
 The old plea ! 'Faith, he 's back,—renews the
 charge ! 205

[*Speaking at the door.*] So long as the man parleys,
 peace outside—

Nor be too ready with your halberts, there !

Gaucelme. My horse bespattered, as he blocked
 the path

A thin sour man, not unlike somebody.

Adolf. He holds a paper in his breast, whereon 210
 He glances when his cheeks flush and his brow
 At each repulse—

If you . . . but how should you remember Cleves?
Yet they of Cleves remember you so well! 240

Ay, comment on each trait of you they keep,
Your words and deeds caught up at second hand,—
Proud, I believe, at bottom of their hearts,
O' the very levity and recklessness
Which only prove that you forget their wrongs. 245

Cleves, the grand town, whose men and women
starve,

Is Cleves forgotten? Then, remember me!
You promised me that you would help me once,
For other purpose: will you keep your word?

Guibert. And who may you be, friend?

Valence. Valence of Cleves. 250

Guibert. Valence of . . . not the advocate of
Cleves,

I owed my whole estate to, three years back?
Ay, well may you keep silence! Why, my lords,
You've heard, I'm sure, how, Pentecost three
years,

I was so nearly ousted of my land 255

By some knave's pretext—(eh? when you refused me
Your ugly daughter, Clugnet!)—and you've heard
How I recovered it by miracle

—(When I refused her!) Here's the very friend,
—Valence of Cleves, all parties have to thank! 260

Nay, Valence, this procedure's vile in you!

I'm no more grateful than a courtier should,
But politic am I—I bear a brain,

Can cast about a little, might require
Your services a second time. I tried 265

To tempt you with advancement here to court

—“No!”—well, for curiosity at least

To view our life here—“No!”—our Duchess,
then,—

A pretty woman's worth some pains to see,

ACT I COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Nor is she spoiled, I take it, if a crown 270
Complete the forehead pale and tresses pure . . .

Valence. Our city trusted me its miseries,
And I am come.

Guibert. So much for taste ! But "come,"—
So may you be, for anything I know,
To beg the Pope's cross, or Sir Clugnet's daughter, 275
And with an equal chance you get all three.

If it was ever worth your while to come,
Was not the proper way worth finding too ?

Valence. Straight to the palace-portal, sir, I
came—

Guibert. —And said ?—

Valence. —That I had brought the miseries 280
Of a whole city to relieve.

Guibert. —Which saying
Won your admittance ? You saw me, indeed,
And here, no doubt, you stand : as certainly,
My intervention, I shall not dispute,
Procures you audience ; which, if I procure,— 285
That paper 's closely written—by Saint Paul,
Here flock the Wrongs, follow the Remedies,
Chapter and verse, One, Two, A, B and C !
Perhaps you 'd enter, make a reverence,
And launch these "miseries" from first to last ? 290

Valence. How should they let me pause or turn
aside ?

Gaucelme [*to VALENCE*]. My worthy sir, one
question ! You 've come straight
From Cleves, you tell us : heard you any talk
At Cleves about our lady ?

Valence. Much.

Gaucelme. And what ?

Valence. Her wish was to redress all wrongs
she knew. 295

Gaucelme. That, you believed ?

Valence. You see me, sir !

Gaucelme. —Nor stopped

Upon the road from Cleves to Juliers here,
For any—rumours you might find afloat?

Valence. I had my townsmen's wrongs to busy me.

Gaucelme. This is the lady's birthday, do you know?

—Her day of pleasure?

Valence. —That the great, I know,

For pleasure born, should still be on the watch

To exclude pleasure when a duty offers:

Even as, for duty born, the lowly too

May ever snatch a pleasure if in reach : 305

Both will have plenty of their birthright, sir !

Gaucelme [*aside to GUIBERT*]. Sir Guibert, here's your man! No scruples now—

You 'll never find his like! Time presses hard.

I 've seen your drift and Adolf's too, this while,

But you can't keep the hour of audience back 310

Much longer, and at noon the Prince arrives.

[*Pointing to VALENCE.*] Entrust him with it—fool
no chance away!

Guibert. Him?

Gaucelme. —With the missive! What's
the man to her?

Guibert. No bad thought! Yet, 't is yours,
who ever played

The tempting serpent: else 't were no bad thought! 315

I should—and do—mistrust it for your sake,

Or else . . .

Enter an Official who communicates with ADOLF

Adolf. The Duchess will receive the court.

Guibert. Give us a moment, Adolf! Valence,
friend.

I'll help you. We of the service, you're to mark,

Have special entry, while the herd . . . the folk 320
 Outside, get access through our help alone ;
 —Well, it is so, was so, and I suppose
 So ever will be : your natural lot is, therefore,
 To wait your turn and opportunity,
 And probably miss both. Now, I engage 325
 To set you, here and in a minute's space,
 Before the lady, with full leave to plead
 Chapter and verse, and A, and B, and C,
 To heart's content.

Valence. I grieve that I must ask,—
 This being, yourself admit, the custom here,— 330
 To what the price of such a favour mounts ?

Guibert. Just so ! You 're not without a cour-
 tier's tact.

Little at court, as your quick instinct prompts,
 Do such as we without a recompense.

Valence. Yours is ?—

Guibert. A trifle : here 's a document 335
 'T is some one's duty to present her Grace—
 I say, not mine—these say, not theirs—such points
 Have weight at court. Will you relieve us all
 And take it ? Just say, " I am bidden lay
 " This paper at the Duchess' feet ! "

Valence. No more ? 340

I thank you, sir !

Adolf. Her Grace receives the court.

Guibert [*aside*]. Now, *sursum corda*, quoth the
 mass-priest ! Do—

Whoever 's my kind saint, do let alone
 These pushings to and fro, and pullings back ;
 Peaceably let me hang o' the devil's arm 345
 The downward path, if you can't pluck me off
 Completely ! Let me live quite his, or yours !

[*The Courtiers begin to range themselves, and
 move toward the door.*]

After me, Valence ! So, our famous Cleves
Lacks bread ? Yet don't we gallants buy their
lace ?

And dear enough—it beggars me, I know, 350
To keep my very gloves fringed properly.
This, Valence, is our Great State Hall you cross ;
Yon grey urn 's veritable marcasite,
The Pope's gift : and those salvers testify
The Emperor. Presently you 'll set your foot 355
. . . But you don't speak, friend Valence !

Valence. I shall speak.

Gaucelme [aside to GUIBERT]. Guibert—it were
no such ungraceful thing

If you and I, at first, seemed horror-struck
With the bad news. Look here, what you shall do.
Suppose you, first, clap hand to sword and cry 360
“Yield strangers our allegiance ? First I 'll perish
“Beside your Grace !”—and so give me the cue
To . . .

Guibert. —Clap your hand to note-book and jot
down

That to regale the Prince with ? I conceive.
[*To VALENCE.*] Do, Valence, speak, or I shall half
suspect 365

You 're plotting to supplant us, me the first,
I' the lady's favour ! Is 't the grand harangue
You mean to make, that thus engrosses you ?
—Which of her virtues you 'll apostrophize ?
Or is 't the fashion you aspire to start, 370
Of that close-curved, not unbecoming hair ?
Or what else ponder you ?

Valence. My townsmen's wrongs.

ACT II

NOON

SCENE—*The presence-chamber*

The DUCHESS *and* SABYNE

The Duchess. Announce that I am ready for the court !

Sabyne. 'T is scarcely audience-hour, I think ;
your Grace

May best consult your own relief, no doubt,
And shun the crowd : but few can have arrived.

The Duchess. Let those not yet arrived, then,
keep away !

'T was me, this day last year at Ravestein,
You hurried. It has been full time, beside,
This half-hour. Do you hesitate ?

Sabyne. Forgive me !

The Duchess. Stay, Sabyne ; let me hasten to
make sure

Of one true thanker : here with you begins
My audience, claim you first its privilege !

It is my birth's event they celebrate :

You need not wish me more such happy days,
But—ask some favour ! Have you none to ask ?

Has Adolf none, then ? this was far from least
Of much I waited for impatiently,

Assure yourself ! It seemed so natural

Your gift, beside this bunch of river-bells,

Should be the power and leave of doing good
To you, and greater pleasure to myself. 20
You ask my leave to-day to marry Adolf?
The rest is my concern.

Sabyne. Your Grace is ever
Our lady of dear Ravestein,—but, for Adolf . . .

The Duchess. “But”? You have not, sure,
changed in your regard
And purpose towards him?

Sabyne. We change?

The Duchess. Well then? Well? 25

Sabyne. How could we two be happy, and, most
like,
Leave Juliers, when—when . . . but 't is audience-
time!

The Duchess. “When, if you left me, I were left
indeed!”

Would you subjoin that?—Bid the court approach!
—Why should we play thus with each other, *Sabyne*? 30
Do I not know, if courtiers prove remiss,
If friends detain me, and get blame for it,
There is a cause? Of last year's fervid throng
Scarce one half comes now.

Sabyne [*aside*]. One half? No, alas!

The Duchess. So can the mere suspicion of a
cloud 35

Over my fortunes, strike each loyal heart.
They 've heard of this Prince Berthold; and,
forsooth,
Some foolish arrogant pretence he makes,
May grow more foolish and more arrogant,
They please to apprehend! I thank their love. 40
Admit them!

Sabyne [*aside*]. How much has she really learned?

The Duchess. Surely, whoever's absent, Tristan
waits?

—Or at least Romuald, whom my father raised
From nothing—come, he's faithful to me, come!
(Sabyne, I should but be the prouder—yes, 45
The fitter to comport myself aright)
Not Romuald? Xavier—what said he to that?
For Xavier hates a parasite, I know!

[SABYNE goes out.]

The Duchess. Well, sunshine's everywhere,
and summer too.

Next year 't is the old place again, perhaps— 50
The water-breeze again, the birds again.
—It cannot be! It is too late to be!
What part had I, or choice in all of it?
Hither they brought me; I had not to think
Nor care, concern myself with doing good 55
Or ill, my task was just—to live,—to live,
And, answering ends there was no need explain,
To render Juliers happy—so they said.
All could not have been falsehood: some was love,
And wonder and obedience. I did all 60
They looked for: why then cease to do it now?
Yet this is to be calmly set aside,
And—ere next birthday's dawn, for aught I know,
Things change, a claimant may arrive, and I . . .
It cannot nor it shall not be! His right? 65
Well then, he has the right, and I have not,
—But who bade all of you surround my life
And close its growth up with your ducal crown
Which, plucked off rudely, leaves me perishing?
I could have been like one of you,—loved, hoped, 70
Feared, lived and died like one of you—but you
Would take that life away and give me this,
And I will keep this! I will face you! Come!

Enter the Courtiers and VALENCE

The Courtiers. Many such happy mornings to your Grace !

The Duchess [*aside, as they pay their devoir*]. The same words, the same faces,—the same love ! 75
I have been overfearful. These are few ;
But these, at least, stand firmly : these are mine.
As many come as may ; and if no more,
'T is that these few suffice—they do suffice !
What succour may not next year bring me ?
Plainly, 80

I feared too soon. [*To the Courtiers.*] I thank you, sirs : all thanks !

Valence [*aside, as the DUCHESS passes from one group to another, conversing*]. 'T is she—the vision this day last year brought,
When, for a golden moment at our Cleves,
She tarried in her progress hither. Cleves
Chose me to speak its welcome, and I spoke 85
—Not that she could have noted the recluse
—Ungainly, old before his time—who gazed.
Well, Heaven's gifts are not wasted, and that gaze
Kept, and shall keep me to the end, her own !
She was above it—but so would not sink 90
My gaze to earth ! The People caught it, hers—
Thenceforward, mine ; but thus entirely mine,
Who shall affirm, had she not raised my soul
Ere she retired and left me—them ? She turns—
There's all her wondrous face at once ! The ground 95
Reels and . . . [*suddenly occupying himself with his paper*]

These wrongs of theirs I have to plead !
The Duchess [*to the Courtiers*]. Nay, compliment enough ! and kindness' self

Should pause before it wish me more such years.
'T was fortunate that thus, ere youth escaped,
I tasted life's pure pleasure—one such, pure, 100
Is worth a thousand, mixed—and youth's for
pleasure :

Mine is received ; let my age pay for it.

Gauzelme. So, pay, and pleasure paid for, thinks
your Grace,

Should never go together?

Guibert. How, Sir Gaucelme?

Hurry one's feast down unenjoyingly 105

At the snatched breathing-intervals of work?

As good you saved it till the dull day's-end

When, stiff and sleepy, appetite is gone.

Eat first, then work upon the strength of food !

The Duchess. True: you enable me to risk my future,

110

By giving me a past beyond recall.

I lived, a girl, one happy leisure year :

Let me endeavour to be the Duchess now!

And so,—what news, Sir Guibert, spoke you of?

[As they advance a little, and GUIBERT speaks—
—That gentleman?

Valence [aside]. I feel her eyes on me. 115

Guibert [to VALENCE]. The Duchess, sir, inclines to hear your suit.

Advance! He is from Cleves.

Valence [coming forward. *Aside*]. Their wrongs
—their wrongs!

The Duchess. And you, sir, are from Cleves?
How fresh in mind,

The hour or two I passed at queenly Cleves !
She entertained me bravely, but the best
Of her good pageant seemed its standers-by
With insuppressive joy on every face !
What says my ancient famous happy Cleves ?

Valence. Take the truth, lady—you are made for truth!

So think my friends : nor do they less deserve 125

The having you to take it, you shall think,

When you know all—nay, when you only know

How, on that day you recollect at Cleves,

When the poor acquiescing multitude

Who thrust themselves with all their woes apart 130

Into unnoticed corners, that the few,

Their means sufficed to muster trappings for,

Might fill the foreground, occupy your sight

With joyous faces fit to bear away

And boast of as a sample of all Cleves 135

—How, when to daylight these crept out once more,

Clutching, unconscious, each his empty rags

Whence the scant coin, which had not half

bought bread,

That morn he shook forth, counted piece by piece,

And, well-advisedly, on perfumes spent them 140

To burn, or flowers to strew, before your path

—How, when the golden flood of music and bliss

Ebbed, as their moon retreated, and again

Left the sharp black-point rocks of misery bare

—Then I, their friend, had only to suggest 145

“Saw she the horror as she saw the pomp!”

And as one man they cried “He speaks the truth :

“Show her the horror! Take from our own

mouths

“Our wrongs and show them, she will see them

too !”

This they cried, lady! I have brought the wrongs. 150

The Duchess. Wrongs? Cleves has wrongs—

apparent now and thus?

I thank you! In that paper? Give it me!

Valence. (There, Cleves!) In this! (What did

I promise, Cleves?)

ACT II COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Our weavers, clothiers, spinners are reduced
 Since . . . Oh, I crave your pardon ! I forget 155
 I buy the privilege of this approach,
 And promptly would discharge my debt. I lay
 This paper humbly at the Duchess' feet.

[*Presenting* GUIBERT's *paper*.

Guibert. Stay ! for the present . . .

The Duchess. Stay, sir ? I take aught
 That teaches me their wrongs with greater pride 160
 Than this your ducal circlet. Thank you, sir !

[*The DUCHESS reads hastily ; then, turning
 to the Courtiers—*

What have I done to you ? Your deed or mine
 Was it, this crowning me ? I gave myself
 No more a title to your homage, no,
 Than church-flowers, born this season, wrote the
 words 165

In the saint's-book that sanctified them first.
 For such a flower, you plucked me ; well, you
 erred—

Well, 't was a weed ; remove the eye-sore quick !
 But should you not remember it has lain
 Steeped in the candles' glory, palely shrined, 170
 Nearer God's Mother than most earthly things ?
 —That if 't be faded 't is with prayer's sole
 breath—

That the one day it boasted was God's day ?
 Still, I do thank you ! Had you used respect,
 Here might I dwindle to my last white leaf, 175
 Here lose life's latest freshness, which even yet
 May yield some wandering insect rest and food :
 So, fling me forth, and—all is best for all !

[*After a pause.*] Prince Berthold, who art Juliers'
 Duke it seems—

The King's choice, and the Emperor's, and the
 Pope's— 180

Be mine, too ! Take this People ! Tell not me
Of rescripts, precedents, authorities,
—But take them, from a heart that yearns to give !
Find out their love,—I could not; find their fear,—
I would not ; find their like,—I never shall, 185
Among the flowers ! [*Taking off her coronet.*]

Colombe of Ravestein

Thanks God she is no longer Duchess here !

Valence [*advancing to* GUIBERT]. Sir Guibert,
knight, they call you—this of mine

Is the first step I ever set at court.

You dared make me your instrument, I find ; 190

For that, so sure as you and I are men,

We reckon to the utmost presently :

But as you are a courtier and I none,

Your knowledge may instruct me. I, already,

Have too far outraged, by my ignorance 195

Of courtier-ways, this lady, to proceed

A second step and risk addressing her :

—I am degraded—you let me address !

Out of her presence, all is plain enough

What I shall do—but in her presence, too, 200

Surely there 's something proper to be done.

[*To the others.*] You, gentles, tell me if I guess
aright—

May I not strike this man to earth ?

The Courtiers [*as* GUIBERT *springs forward, with-*
holding him]. Let go !

—The clothiers' spokesman, Guibert ? Grace a
churl ?

The Duchess [*to* VALENCE]. Oh, be acquainted
with your party, sir ! 205

He 's of the oldest lineage Juliers boasts ;

A lion crests him for a cognizance ;

“Scorning to waver”—that 's his 'scutcheon's
word ;

ACT II COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

His office with the new Duke—probably
 The same in honour as with me; or more, 210
 By so much as this gallant turn deserves.
 He 's now, I dare say, of a thousand times
 The rank and influence that remain with her
 Whose part you take! So, lest for taking it
 You suffer . . .

Valence. I may strike him then to earth? 215

Guibert [*falling on his knee*]. Great and dear
 lady, pardon me! Hear once!

Believe me and be merciful—be just!
 I could not bring myself to give that paper
 Without a keener pang than I dared meet
 —And so felt Clugnet here, and Maufroy here 220
 —No one dared meet it. Protestation 's cheap,—
 But, if to die for you did any good,
 [*To GAUCELME.*] Would not I die, sir? Say your
 worst of me!

But it does no good, that 's the mournful truth.
 And since the hint of a resistance, even, 225
 Would just precipitate, on you the first,
 A speedier ruin—I shall not deny,
 Saving myself indubitable pain,
 I thought to give you pleasure (who might say?)
 By showing that your only subject found 230
 To carry the sad notice, was the man
 Precisely ignorant of its contents;
 A nameless, mere provincial advocate;
 One whom 't was like you never saw before,
 Never would see again. All has gone wrong; 235
 But I meant right, God knows, and you, I
 trust!

The Duchess. A nameless advocate, this gentleman?

—(I pardon you, Sir Guibert!)

Guibert [*rising, to VALENCE*]. Sir, and you?

Valence. —Rejoice that you are lightened of a load.

Now, you have only me to reckon with. 240

The Duchess. One I have never seen, much less obliged?

Valence. Dare I speak, lady?

The Duchess. Dare you! Heard you not I rule no longer?

Valence. Lady, if your rule
Were based alone on such a ground as these
[*Pointing to the Courtiers.*
Could furnish you,—abjure it! They have hidden 245
A source of true dominion from your sight.

The Duchess. You hear them—no such source is left . . .

Valence. Hear Cleves!
Whose haggard craftsmen rose to starve this day,
Starve now, and will lie down at night to starve,
Sure of a like to-morrow—but as sure 250

Of a most unlike morrow-after-that,
Since end things must, end howsoe'er things may.
What curbs the brute-force instinct in its hour?
What makes—instead of rising, all as one,
And teaching fingers, so expert to wield 255
Their tool, the broadsword's play or carbine's trick,
—What makes that there 's an easier help, they
think,

For you, whose name so few of them can spell,
Whose face scarce one in every hundred saw,—
You simply have to understand their wrongs, 260
And wrongs will vanish—so, still trades are plied,
And swords lie rusting, and myself stand here?
There is a vision in the heart of each
Of justice, mercy, wisdom, tenderness
To wrong and pain, and knowledge of its cure : 265
And these embodied in a woman's form

ACT II COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

That best transmits them, pure as first received,
From God above her, to mankind below.

Will you derive your rule from such a ground,
Or rather hold it by the suffrage, say, 270
Of this man—this—and this?

The Duchess [after a pause]. You come from
Cleves :

How many are at Cleves of such a mind?

Valence [from his paper]. “We, all the manu-
facturers of Cleves—”

The Duchess. Or stay, sir—lest I seem too
covetous—

Are you my subject? such as you describe, 275
Am I to you, though to no other man?

Valence [from his paper]. —“Valence, ordained
your Advocate at Cleves”—

The Duchess [replacing the coronet]. Then I re-
main Cleves' Duchess! Take you note,
While Cleves but yields one subject of this stamp,
I stand her lady till she waves me off! 280
For her sake, all the Prince claims I withhold;
Laugh at each menace; and, his power defying,
Return his missive with its due contempt!

[Casting it away.

Guibert [picking it up]. —Which to the Prince
I will deliver, lady,
(Note it down, Gaucelme)—with your message
too! 285

The Duchess. I think the office is a subject's, sir!
—Either how style you him?—my special
guarder

The Marshal's—for who knows but violence
May follow the delivery?—Or, perhaps,
My Chancellor's—for law may be to urge 290
On its receipt!—Or, even my Chamberlain's—
For I may violate established form!

[*To VALENCE.*] Sir,—for the half-hour till this service ends,

Will you become all these to me?

Valence [*falling on his knee*]. My liege!

The Duchess. Give me!

[*The Courtiers present their badges of office.*

[*Putting them by.*] Whatever was their

virtue once,

They need new consecration. [*Raising VALENCE.*]

Are you mine?

I will be Duchess yet!

[*She retires.*

The Courtiers.

Our Duchess yet!

A glorious lady! Worthy love and dread!

I'll stand by her,—And I, whate'er betide!

Guibert [*to VALENCE*]. Well done, well done,

sir! I care not who knows,

300

You have done nobly and I envy you—

Tho' I am but unfairly used, I think:

For when one gets a place like this I hold,

One gets too the remark that its mere wages,

The pay and the preferment, make our prize.

305

Talk about zeal and faith apart from these,

We're laughed at—much would zeal and faith
subsist

Without these also! Yet, let these be stopped,

Our wages discontinue,—then, indeed,

Our zeal and faith, (we hear on every side,)

310

Are not released—having been pledged away

I wonder, for what zeal and faith in turn?

Hard money purchased me my place! No, no—

I'm right, sir—but your wrong is better still,

If I had time and skill to argue it.

315

Therefore, I say, I'll serve you, how you please—

If you like,—fight you, as you seem to wish—

(The kinder of me that, in sober truth,

I never dreamed I did you any harm) . . .

Gaucelme. —Or, kinder still, you 'll introduce,
no doubt, 320

His merits to the Prince who 's just at hand,
And let no hint drop he 's made Chancellor
And Chamberlain and Heaven knows what beside!

Clugnet [*to VALENCE*]. You stare, young sir, and
threaten! Let me say,
That at your age, when first I came to court, 325
I was not much above a gentleman;
While now . . .

Valence. —You are Head-Lackey? With
your office

I have not yet been graced, sir!

Other Courtiers [*to CLUGNET*]. Let him talk!
Fidelity, disinterestedness,
Excuse so much! Men claim my worship ever 330
Who staunchly and steadfastly . . .

Enter ADOLF

Adolf. The Prince arrives.

Courtiers. Ha? How?

Adolf. He leaves his guard a stage behind
At Aix, and enters almost by himself.

1st Courtier. The Prince! This foolish business
puts all out.

2nd Courtier. Let Gaucelme speak first!

3rd Courtier. Better I began 335
About the state of Juliers: should one say

All 's prosperous and inviting him?

4th Courtier. —Or rather,
All 's prostrate and imploring him?

5th Courtier. That 's best!
Where 's the Cleves' paper, by the way?

4th Courtier [*to VALENCE*]. Sir—sir—
If you 'll but lend that paper—trust it me, 340
I 'll warrant . . .

5th Courtier. Softly, sir—the Marshal's duty !

Clugnet. Has not the Chamberlain a hearing first
By virtue of his patent ?

Gaucelme. Patents ?—Duties ?

All that, my masters, must begin again !

One word composes the whole controversy : 345

We 're simply now—the Prince's !

The Others. Ay—the Prince's !

Enter Sabyne

Sabyne. Adolf ! Bid . . . Oh, no time for cere-
mony !

Where 's whom our lady calls her only subject ?

She needs him. Who is here the Duchess's ?

Valence [*starting from his reverie*]. Most grate-
fully I follow to her feet. 350

ACT III

AFTERNOON

SCENE.—*The Vestibule*

Enter Prince BERTHOLD and MELCHIOR

Berthold. A thriving little burgh this Juliers looks.

[*Half-apart.*] Keep Juliers, and as good you kept Cologne :

Better try Aix, though !—

Melchior. Please 't your Highness speak ?

Berthold [*as before*]. Aix, Cologne, Frankfort,
—Milan ;—Rome !—

Melchior. The Grave.

More weary seems your Highness, I remark, 5
Than sundry conquerors whose path I 've watched
Through fire and blood to any prize they gain.

I could well wish you, for your proper sake,
Had met some shade of opposition here
—Found a blunt seneschal refuse unlock, 10
Or a scared usher lead your steps astray.

You must not look for next achievement's palm
So easily : this will hurt your conquering.

Berthold. My next ? Ay, as you say, my next
and next !

Well, I am tired, that 's truth, and moody too, 15
This quiet entrance-morning : listen why !
Our little burgh, now, Juliers—'t is indeed

One link, however insignificant,
 Of the great chain by which I reach my hope,
 —A link I must secure ; but otherwise, 20
 You 'd wonder I esteem it worth my grasp.
 Just see what life is, with its shifts and turns !
 It happens now—this very nook—to be
 A place that once . . . not a long while since,
 neither—

When I lived an ambiguous hanger-on 25
 Of foreign courts, and bore my claims about,
 Discarded by one kinsman, and the other
 A poor priest merely,—then, I say, this place
 Shone my ambition's object ; to be Duke—
 Seemed then, what to be Emperor seems now. 30
 My rights were far from judged as plain and sure
 In those days as of late, I promise you :
 And 't was my day-dream, Lady Colombe here
 Might e'en compound the matter, pity me,
 Be struck, say, with my chivalry and grace 35
 (I was a boy !)—bestow her hand at length,
 And make me Duke, in her right if not mine.
 Here am I, Duke confessed, at Juliers now.
 Hearken : if ever I be Emperor,
 Remind me what I felt and said to-day ! 40

Melchior. All this consoles a bookish man like
 me.

—And so will weariness cling to you. Wrong,
 Wrong ! Had you sought the lady's court your-
 self,—

Faced the redoubtables composing it,
 Flattered this, threatened that man, bribed the
 other,— 45

Pleaded by writ and word and deed, your cause,—
 Conquered a footing inch by painful inch,—
 And, after long years' struggle, pounced at last
 On her for prize,—the right life had been lived,

ACT III COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

And justice done to divers faculties 50
 Shut in that brow. Yourself were visible
 As you stood victor, then ; whom now—(your
 pardon !)

I am forced narrowly to search and see,
 So are you hid by helps—this Pope, your uncle—
 Your cousin, the other King ! You are a mind,— 55
 They, body : too much of mere legs-and-arms
 Obstructs themind so ! Matchthese withtheir like :
 Match mind with mind !

Berthold. And where 's your mind to match ?
 They show me legs-and-arms to cope withal !
 I 'd subjugate this city—where 's its mind ? 60

[*The Courtiers enter slowly.*]

Melchior. Got out of sight when you came
 troops and all !

And in its stead, here greets you flesh-and-blood :
 A smug œconomy of both, this first !

[*As CLUGNET bows obsequiously.*]

Well done, gout, all considered !—I may go ?

Berthold. Help me receive them !

Melchior. Oh, they just will say 65

What yesterday at Aix their fellows said—

At Treves, the day before ! Sir Prince, my friend,
 Why do you let your life slip thus ?—Meantime,
 I have my little Juliers to achieve—

The understanding this tough Platonist, 70
 Your holy uncle disinterred, Amelius :

Lend me a company of horse and foot,
 To help me through his tractate—gain my Duchy !

Berthold. And Empire, after that is gained,
 will be—?

Melchior. To help me through your uncle's
 comment, Prince ! [Goes. 75

Berthold. Ah ? Well : he o'er-refines—the
 scholar's fault !



How do I let my life slip? Say, this life,
 I lead now, differs from the common life
 Of other men in mere degree, not kind,
 Of joys and griefs,—still there is such degree, 80
 Mere largeness in a life is something, sure,—
 Enough to care about and struggle for,
 In this world : for this world, the size of things ;
 The sort of things, for that to come, no doubt.
 A great is better than a little aim : 85
 And when I wooed Priscilla's rosy mouth
 And failed so, under that grey convent-wall,
 Was I more happy than I should be now

*[By this time, the Courtiers are ranged
 before him.]*

If failing of my Empire? Not a whit.
 —Here comes the mind, it once had tasked me
 sore 90
 To baffle, but for my advantages !
 All 's best as 't is : these scholars talk and talk.

[Seats himself.]

The Courtiers. Welcome our Prince to Juliers !
 —to his heritage !

Our dutifullest service proffer we !

Clugnet. I, please your Highness, having exer-
 cised 95

The function of Grand Chamberlain at court,
 With much acceptance, as men testify . . .

Berthold. I cannot greatly thank you, gentle-
 men !

The Pope declares my claim to the Duchy founded
 On strictest justice—you concede it, therefore, 100
 I do not wonder : and the kings my friends
 Protest they mean to see such claim enforced,—
 You easily may offer to assist.
 But there 's a slight discretionary power
 To serve me in the matter, you 've had long, 105

ACT III COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Though late you use it. This is well to say—
 But could you not have said it months ago?
 I'm not denied my own Duke's truncheon, true—
 'T is flung me—I stoop down, and from the ground
 Pick it, with all you placid standers-by: 110
 And now I have it, gems and mire at once,
 Grace go with it to my soiled hands, you say!

Guibert. (By Paul, the advocate our doughty
 friend
 Cuts the best figure!)

Gaucelme. If our ignorance
 May have offended, sure our loyalty . . . 115

Berthold. Loyalty? Yours? Oh—of yourselves
 you speak!

I mean the Duchess all this time, I hope!
 And since I have been forced repeat my claims
 As if they never had been urged before,
 As I began, so must I end, it seems. 120
 The formal answer to the grave demand!
 What says the lady?

Courtiers [one to another]. 1st Courtier. Marshal!
 2nd Courtier. Orator!

Guibert. A variation of our mistress' way!
 Wipe off his boots' dust, Clugnet!—that, he waits!
 1st Courtier. Your place!

2nd Courtier. Just now it was your own!

Guibert. The devil's! 125

Berthold [to GUIBERT]. Come forward, friend—
 you with the paper, there!

Is Juliers the first city I've obtained?
 By this time, I may boast proficiency
 In each decorum of the circumstance.
 Give it me as she gave it—the petition, 130
 Demand, you style it! What's required, in brief?
 What title's reservation, appanage's
 Allowance? I heard all at Treves, last week.

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY ACT III

Gaucelme [to GUIBERT]. "Give it him as she gave it!"

Guibert. And why not?

[To BERTHOLD.] The lady crushed your summons
thus together,

135

And bade me, with the very greatest scorn
So fair a frame could hold, inform you . .

Courtiers. Stop—

Idiot !

Guibert. — Inform you she denied your claim,
Defied yourself! (I tread upon his heel,
The blustering advocate!)

Berthold. By heaven and earth ! 140

Dare you jest, sir?

Guibert. Did they at Treves, last week?

Berthold [*starting up*]. Why then, I look much bolder than I knew,

And you prove better actors than I thought:

Since, as I live, I took you as you entered

For just so many dearest friends of mine, 145

Fled from the sinking to the rising power

—The sneaking'st crew, in short, I e'er despised !

Whereas, I am alone here for the moment,

With every soldier left behind at Aix!

Silence? That means the worst? I thought as much!

150

What follows next then?

Courtiers. Gracious Prince, he raves !

Guibert. He asked the truth and why not get the truth?

Berthold. Am I a prisoner? Speak, will somebody?

—But why stand paltering with imbeciles?

Let me see her, or . . .

Guibert. Her, without her leave, 155

Shall no one see : she 's Duchess yet !

ACT III COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Courtiers [*footsteps without, as they are disputing*].

Good chance!

She 's here—the Lady Colombe's self!

Berthold.

'T is well!

[*Aside.*] Array a handful thus against my world?

Not ill done, truly! Were not this a mind

To match one's mind with? Colombe! Let us wait! 160

I failed so, under that grey convent-wall!

She comes.

Guibert. The Duchess! Strangers, range yourselves!

[*As the DUCHESS enters in conversation with VALENCE, BERTHOLD and the Courtiers fall back a little.*

The Duchess. Presagefully it beats, presagefully,
My heart: the right is Berthold's and not mine.

Valence. Grant that he has the right, dare I
mistrust 165

Your power to acquiesce so patiently
As you believe, in such a dream-like change
Of fortune—change abrupt, profound, complete?

The Duchess. Ah, the first bitterness is over now!
Bitter I may have felt it to confront 170

The truth, and ascertain those natures' value

I had so counted on; that was a pang:

But I did bear it, and the worst is over.

Let the Prince take them!

Valence.

And take Juliers too?

—Your people without crosses, wands and chains— 175
Only with hearts?

The Duchess. There I feel guilty, sir!

I cannot give up what I never had:

For I ruled these, not them—these stood between.

Shall I confess, sir? I have heard by stealth

Of Berthold from the first; more news and more: 180

Closer and closer swam the thundercloud,

But I was safely housed with these, I knew.
 At times when to the casement I would turn,
 At a bird's passage or a flower-trail's play,
 I caught the storm's red glimpses on its edge— 185
 Yet I was sure some one of all these friends
 Would interpose : I followed the bird's flight
 Or plucked the flower : some one would interpose!

Valence. Not one thought on the People—and
 Cleves there !

The Duchess. Now, sadly conscious my real
 sway was missed, 190
 Its shadow goes without so much regret :
 Else could I not again thus calmly bid you,
 Answer Prince Berthold !

Valence. Then you acquiesce ?

The Duchess. Remember over whom it was I
 ruled !

Guibert [stepping forward]. Prince Berthold,
 yonder, craves an audience, lady ! 195

The Duchess [to VALENCE]. I only have to turn,
 and I shall face

Prince Berthold ! Oh, my very heart is sick !
 It is the daughter of a line of Dukes
 This scornful insolent adventurer
 Will bid depart from my dead father's halls ! 200
 I shall not answer him—dispute with him—
 But, as he bids, depart ! Prevent it, sir !
 Sir—but a mere day's respite ! Urge for me
 —What I shall call to mind I should have urged
 When time 's gone by : 't will all be mine, you
 urge ! 205

A day—an hour—that I myself may lay
 My rule down ! 'T is too sudden—must not be !
 The world's to hear of it ! Once done—for ever !
 How will it read, sir ? How be sung about ?
 Prevent it !

ACT III COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Berthold [*approaching*]. Your frank indignation,
 lady, 210
 Cannot escape me. Overbold I seem ;
 But somewhat should be pardoned my surprise
 At this reception,—this defiance, rather.
 And if, for their and your sake, I rejoice
 Your virtues could inspire a trusty few 215
 To make such gallant stand in your behalf,
 I cannot but be sorry, for my own,
 Your friends should force me to retrace my steps :
 Since I no longer am permitted speak
 After the pleasant peaceful course prescribed 220
 No less by courtesy than relationship—
 Which I remember, if you once forgot.
 But never must attack pass unrepelled.
 Suffer that, through you, I demand of these,
 Who controverts my claim to Juliers?

The Duchess. —Me 225

You say, you do not speak to—

Berthold. Of your subjects
 I ask, then : whom do you accredit? Where
 Stand those should answer?

Valence [*advancing*]. The lady is alone.

Berthold. Alone, and thus? So weak and yet
 so bold?

Valence. I said she was alone—

Berthold. And weak, I said. 230

Valence. When is man strong until he feels alone?

It was some lonely strength at first, be sure,
 Created organs, such as those you seek,
 By which to give its varied purpose shape :
 And, naming the selected ministrants, 235
 Took sword, and shield, and sceptre,—each, a
 man !

That strength performed its work and passed its
 way :

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY ACT III

You see our lady : there, the old shapes stand !
 —A Marshal, Chamberlain, and Chancellor—
 “Be helped their way, into their death put life 240
 “And find advantage !”—so you counsel us.
 But let strength feel alone, seek help itself,—
 And, as the inland-hatched sea-creature hunts
 The sea's breast out,—as, littered 'mid the waves
 The desert-brute makes for the desert's joy, 245
 So turns our lady to her true resource,
 Passing o'er hollow fictions, worn-out types,
 —And I am first her instinct fastens on.
 And prompt I say, as clear as heart can speak,
 The People will not have you ; nor shall have ! 250
 It is not merely I shall go bring Cleves
 And fight you to the last,—though that does much,
 And men and children,—ay, and women too,
 Fighting for home, are rather to be feared
 Than mercenaries fighting for their pay— 255
 But, say you beat us, since such things have been,
 And, where this Juliers laughed, you set your
 foot

Upon a steaming bloody splash—what then ?
 Stand you the more our lord that there you stand ?
 Lord it o'er troops whose force you concentrate, 260
 A pillared flame whereto all ardours tend—
 Lord it 'mid priests whose schemes you amplify,
 A cloud of smoke 'neath which all shadows brood—
 But never, in this gentle spot of earth,
 Can you become our Colombe, our play-queen, 265
 For whom, to furnish lilies for her hair,
 We 'd pour our veins forth to enrich the soil.
 —Our conqueror ? Yes !—Our despot ? Yes !—
 Our Duke ?

Know yourself, know us !

Berthold [who has been in thought]. Know your
 lady, also !

ACT III COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

[*Very deferentially.*].—To whom I needs must
exculpate myself 270

For having made a rash demand, at least.

Wherefore to you, sir, who appear to be

Her chief adviser, I submit my claims,

[*Giving papers.*

But, this step taken, take no further step,

Until the Duchess shall pronounce their worth. 275

Here be our meeting-place ; at night, its time :

Till when I humbly take the lady's leave !

[*He withdraws. As the DUCHESS turns to
VALENCE, the Courtiers interchange
glances and come forward a little.*

1st Courtier. So, this was their device !

2nd Courtier. No bad device !

3rd Courtier. You 'd say they love each other,
Guibert's friend

From Cleves, and she, the Duchess !

4th Courtier. —And moreover, 280

That all Prince Berthold comes for, is to help

Their loves !

5th Courtier. Pray, Guibert, what is next to do ?

Guibert [*advancing*]. I laid my office at the
Duchess' foot—

Others. And I—and I—and I !

The Duchess. I took them, sirs.

Guibert [*apart to VALENCE*]. And now, sir, I am
simple knight again— 285

Guibert, of the great ancient house, as yet

That never bore affront ; whate'er your birth,—

As things stand now, I recognize yourself

(If you 'll accept experience of some date)

As like to be the leading man o' the time, 290

Therefore as much above me now, as I

Seemed above you this morning. Then, I
offered

To fight you : will you be as generous
And now fight me ?

Valence. Ask when my life is mine !

Guibert. ('T is hers now !)

Clugnet [*apart to VALENCE, as GUIBERT turns from him*]. You, sir, have insulted me 295

Grossly,—will grant me, too, the selfsame favour
You've granted him, just now, I make no question?

Valence. I promise you, as him, sir.

Clugnet. Do you so ?

Handsomely said ! I hold you to it, sir.

You 'll get me reinstated in my office 300

As you will Guibert !

The Duchess. I would be alone !

[*They begin to retire slowly ; as VALENCE is about to follow—*

Alone, sir—only with my heart : you stay !

Gaucelme. You hear that ? Ah, light breaks
upon me ! Cleves—

It was at Cleves some man harangued us all—
With great effect,—so those who listened said, 305

My thoughts being busy elsewhere : was this he ?

Guibert,—your strange, disinterested man !

Your uncorrupted, if uncourtly friend !

The modest worth you mean to patronize !

He cares about no Duchesses, not he— 310

His sole concern is with the wrongs of Cleves !

What, Guibert ? What, it breaks on you at last ?

Guibert. Would this hall's floor were a mine's
roof ! I 'd back

And in her very face . . .

Gaucelme. Apply the match

That fired the train,—and where would you be,
pray ? 315

Guibert. With him !

Gaucelme. Stand, rather, safe outside with me !

ACT III COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

The mine's charged: shall I furnish you the match
And place you properly? To the antechamber!

Guibert. Can you?

Gaucelme. Try me! Your friend's in fortune!

Guibert. Quick—

To the antechamber! He is pale with bliss! 320

Gaucelme. No wonder! Mark her eyes!

Guibert. To the antechamber!

[*The Courtiers retire.*]

The Duchess. Sir, could you know all you have
done for me

You were content! You spoke, and I am saved.

Valence. Be not too sanguine, lady! Ere you
dream,

That transient flush of generosity 325

Fades off, perchance. The man, beside, is gone,—

Him we might bend; but see, the papers here—

Inalterably his requirement stays,

And cold hard words have we to deal with now.

In that large eye there seemed a latent pride, 330

To self-denial not incompetent,

But very like to hold itself dispensed

From such a grace: however, let us hope!

He is a noble spirit in noble form.

I wish he less had bent that brow to smile 335

As with the fancy how he could subject

Himself upon occasion to—himself!

From rudeness, violence, you rest secure;

But do not think your Duchy rescued yet!

The Duchess. You,—who have opened a new
world to me, 340

Will never take the faded language up

Of that I leave? My Duchy—keeping it,

Or losing it—is that my sole world now?

Valence. Ill have I spoken if you thence despise
Juliers; although the lowest, on true grounds, 345

Be worth more than the highest rule, on false :
Aspire to rule, on the true grounds !

The Duchess.

Nay, hear—

False, I will never—rash, I would not be !
This is indeed my birthday—soul and body,
Its hours have done on me the work of years. 350
You hold the requisition : ponder it !

If I have right, my duty 's plain : if he—
Say so, nor ever change a tone of voice !
At night you meet the Prince ; meet me at eve !
Till when, farewell ! This discomposes you ? 355

Believe in your own nature, and its force
Of renovating mine ! I take my stand
Only as under me the earth is firm :
So, prove the first step stable, all will prove.
That first, I choose : [*Laying her hand on his.*—the
next to take, choose you ! [*She withdraws.* 360

Valence [after a pause]. What drew down this on
me?—on me, dead once,

She thus bids live,—since all I hitherto
Thought dead in me, youth's ardours and emprise,
Burst into life before her, as she bids
Who needs them. Whither will this reach, where
end ? 365

Her hand's print burns on mine . . . Yet she 's
above—

So very far above me ! All 's too plain :
I served her when the others sank away,
And she rewards me as such souls reward—
The changed voice, the suffusion of the cheek, 370
The eye's acceptance, the expressive hand,
—Reward, that 's little, in her generous thought,
Though all to me . . .

I cannot so disclaim
Heaven's gift, nor call it other than it is !
She loves me !

ACT III COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

[*Looking at the Prince's papers.*—Which love,
 these, perchance, forbid. O fir-
 Can I decide against myself—pronounce 375
 She is the Duchess and no mate for me?
 —Cleves, help me! Teach me,—every haggard
 face,—
 To sorrow and endure! I will do right
 Whatever be the issue. Help me, Cleves! 380

ACT IV

EVENING

SCENE—*An Antechamber*

Enter the Courtiers

Maufroy. Now, then, that we may speak—how
spring this mine?

Gaucelme. Is Guibert ready for its match? He
cools!

Not so friend Valence with the Duchess there!

“Stay, Valence! Are not you my better self?”

And her cheek mantled—

Guibert. Well, she loves him, sir: 5

And more,—since you will have it I grow cool,—

She's right: he's worth it.

Gaucelme. For his deeds to-day?

Say so!

Guibert. What should I say beside?

Gaucelme. Not this—

For friendship's sake leave this for me to say—

That we're the dupes of an egregious cheat! 10

This plain unpractised suitor, who found way

To the Duchess through the merest die's turn-up

A year ago, had seen her and been seen,

Loved and been loved.

Guibert. Impossible!

Gaucelme. —Nor say,

How sly and exquisite a trick, moreover, 15

Was this which—taking not their stand on facts

ACT IV COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Boldly, for that had been endurable,
 But worming on their way by craft, they choose
 Resort to, rather,—and which you and we,
 Sheep-like, assist them in the playing-off! 20
 The Duchess thus parades him as preferred,
 Not on the honest ground of preference,
 Seeing first, liking more, and there an end—
 But as we all had started equally,
 And at the close of a fair race he proved 25
 The only valiant, sage and loyal man.
 Herself, too, with the pretty fits and starts,—
 The careless, winning, candid ignorance
 Of what the Prince might challenge or forego—
 She had a hero in reserve! What risk 30
 Ran she? This deferential easy Prince
 Who brings his claims for her to ratify
 —He 's just her puppet for the nonce! You 'll
 see,—

Valence pronounces, as is equitable,
 Against him : off goes the confederate : 35
 As equitably, Valence takes her hand!

The Chancellor. You run too fast : her hand, no
 subject takes.

Do not our archives hold her father's will?
 That will provides against such accident,
 And gives next heir, Prince Berthold, the reversion 40
 Of Juliers, which she forfeits, wedding so.

Gaucelme. I know that, well as you,—but does
 the Prince?

Knows Berthold, think you, that this plan, he helps,
 For Valence's ennoblement,—would end,
 If crowned with the success which seems its due, 45
 In making him the very thing he plays,
 The actual Duke of Juliers? All agree
 That Colombe's title waived or set aside,
 He is next heir.

The Chancellor. Incontrovertibly.

Gaucelme. Guibert, your match, now, to the train!

Guibert. Enough! 50

I'm with you: selfishness is best again.

I thought of turning honest—what a dream!

Let's wake now!

Gaucelme. Selfish, friend, you never were:
'T was but a series of revenges taken
On your unselfishness for prospering ill. 55
But now that you're grown wiser, what's our
course?

Guibert. —Wait, I suppose, till Valence weds
our lady,
And then, if we must needs revenge ourselves,
Apprise the Prince.

Gaucelme. —The Prince, ere then dismissed
With thanks for playing his mock part so well? 60
Tell the Prince now, sir! Ay, this very night,
Ere he accepts his dole and goes his way,
Explain how such a marriage makes him Duke,
Then trust his gratitude for the surprise!

Guibert. —Our lady wedding Valence all the
same 65
As if the penalty were undisclosed?

Good! If she loves, she'll not disown her love,
Throw Valence up. I wonder you see that.

Gaucelme. The shame of it—the suddenness and
shame!
Within her, the inclining heart—without, 70
A terrible array of witnesses—
And Valence by, to keep her to her word,
With Berthold's indignation or disgust!
We'll try it!—Not that we can venture much.
Her confidence we've lost for ever: Berthold's 75
Is all to gain.

Whate'er it was, the rule expires as well.
 —Valence, this rapture . . . selfish can it be? 105
 Eject it from your heart, her home!—It stays!
 Ah, the brave world that opens on us both!
 —Do my poor townsmen so esteem it? Cleves,—
 I need not your pale faces! This, reward
 For service done to you? Too horrible! 110
 I never served you: 't was myself I served—
 Nay, served not—rather saved from punishment
 Which, had I failed you then, would plague me
 now.
 My life continues yours, and your life, mine.
 But if, to take God's gift, I swerve no step— 115
 Cleves! If I breathe no prayer for it—if she,
 [*Footsteps without.*
 Colombe, that comes now, freely gives herself—
 Will Cleves require, that, turning thus to her,
 I . . .

Enter Prince BERTHOLD

Pardon, sir! I did not look for you
 Till night, i' the Hall; nor have as yet declared 120
 My judgment to the lady.

Berthold. So I hoped.

Valence. And yet I scarcely know why that
 should check

The frank disclosure of it first to you—
 What her right seems, and what, in consequence,
 She will decide on.

Berthold. That I need not ask.

Valence. You need not: I have proved the 125
 lady's mind:

And, justice being to do, dare act for her.

Berthold. Doubtless she has a very noble mind.

Valence. Oh, never fear but she 'll in each con-
 juncture

ACT IV COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Bear herself bravely ! She no whit depends 130
On circumstance ; as she adorns a throne,
She had adorned . . .

Berthold. A cottage—in what book
Have I read that, of every queen that lived ?
A throne ! You have not been instructed, sure,
To forestall my request ?

Valence. 'T is granted, sir ! 135
My heart instructs me. I have scrutinized
Your claims . . .

Berthold. Ah—claims, you mean, at first
preferred?

I come, before the hour appointed me,
To pray you let those claims at present rest,
In favour of a new and stronger one. 140

Valence. You shall not need a stronger : on
the part
O' the lady, all you offer I accept,
Since one clear right suffices : yours is clear.
Propose !

Berthold. I offer her my hand.

Valence. Your hand ?

Berthold. A Duke's, yourself say ; and, at no
far time, 145

Something here whispers me—an Emperor's.
The lady's mind is noble : which induced
This seizure of occasion ere my claims
Were—settled, let us amicably say !

Valence. Your hand !

Berthold. (He will fall down and kiss it next !) 150
Sir, this astonishment 's too flattering,
Nor must you hold your mistress' worth so cheap.
Enhance it, rather,—urge that blood is blood—
The daughter of the Burgraves, Landgraves,
Markgraves,
Remains their daughter ! I shall scarce gainsay. 155

Elsewhere or here, the lady needs must rule :
Like the imperial crown's great chrysoprase,
They talk of—somewhat out of keeping there,
And yet no jewel for a meaner cap.

Valence. You wed the Duchess?

Berthold. Cry you mercy, friend ! 160
Will the match also influence fortunes here ?
A natural solicitude enough.

Be certain, no bad chance it proves for you !
However high you take your present stand,
There 's prospect of a higher still remove— 165
For Juliers will not be my resting-place,
And, when I have to choose a substitute
To rule the little burgh, I 'll think of you
Who need not give your mates a character.
And yet I doubt your fitness to supplant 170
The grey smooth Chamberlain : he 'd hesitate
A doubt his lady could demean herself
So low as to accept me. Courage, sir !
I like your method better : feeling's play
Is franker much, and flatters me beside. 175

Valence. I am to say, you love her ?

Berthold. Say that too !
Love has no great concernment, thinks the world,
With a Duke's marriage. How go precedents
In Juliers' story—how use Juliers' Dukes ?
I see you have them here in goodly row ; 180
Yon must be Luitpold—ay, a stalwart sire !
Say, I have been arrested suddenly
In my ambition's course, its rocky course,
By this sweet flower : I fain would gather it
And then proceed : so say and speedily 185
—(Nor stand there like Duke Luitpold's brazen self!)
Enough, sir : you possess my mind, I think.
This is my claim, the others being withdrawn,
And to this be it that, i' the Hall to-night,

ACT IV COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Your lady's answer comes ; till when, farewell !
[He retires.]

Valence [after a pause]. The heavens and earth
 stay as they were ; my heart
 Beats as it beat : the truth remains the truth
 What falls away, then, if not faith in her ?
 Was it my faith, that she could estimate
 Love's value, and, such faith still guiding me, 195
 Dare I now test her ? Or grew faith so strong
 Solely because no power of test was mine ?

Enter the DUCHESS

The Duchess. My fate, sir ! Ah, you turn away.
 All 's over.

But you are sorry for me ? Be not so !
 What I might have become, and never was, 200
 Regret with me ! What I have merely been,
 Rejoice I am no longer ! What I seem
 Beginning now, in my new state, to be,
 Hope that I am !—for, once my rights proved void,
 This heavy roof seems easy to exchange 205
 For the blue sky outside—my lot henceforth.

Valence. And what a lot is Berthold's !

The Duchess. How of him ?

Valence. He gathers earth's whole good into
 his arms ;

Standing, as man now, stately, strong and wise,
 Marching to fortune, not surprised by her. 210
 One great aim, like a guiding-star, above—
 Which tasks strength, wisdom, stateliness, to lift
 His manhood to the height that takes the prize ;
 A prize not near—lest overlooking earth
 He rashly spring to seize it—nor remote, 215
 So that he rest upon his path content :
 But day by day, while shimmering grows shine,
 And the faint circlet prophesies the orb,

He sees so much as, just evolving these,
 The stateliness, the wisdom and the strength, 220
 To due completion, will suffice this life,
 And lead him at his grandest to the grave.
 After this star, out of a night he springs ;
 A beggar's cradle for the throne of thrones
 He quits ; so, mounting, feels each step he mounts, 225
 Nor, as from each to each exultingly
 He passes, overleaps one grade of joy.
 This, for his own good:—with the world, each gift
 Of God and man,—reality, tradition,
 Fancy and fact—so well environ him, 230
 That as a mystic panoply they serve—
 Of force, untenanted, to awe mankind,
 And work his purpose out with half the world,
 While he, their master, dexterously slipt
 From such encumbrance, is meantime employed 235
 With his own prowess on the other half.
 Thus shall he prosper, every day's success
 Adding, to what is he, a solid strength—
 An æry might to what encircles him,
 Till at the last, so life's routine lends help, 240
 That as the Emperor only breathes and moves,
 His shadow shall be watched, his step or stalk
 Become a comfort or a portent, how
 He trails his ermine take significance,—
 Till even his power shall cease to be most power, 245
 And men shall dread his weakness more, nor
 dare
 Peril their earth its bravest, first and best,
 Its typified invincibility.
 Thus shall he go on, greatening, till he ends—
 The man of men, the spirit of all flesh, 250
 The fiery centre of an earthly world !

The Duchess. Some such a fortune I had dreamed
 should rise

ACT IV COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Out of my own—that is, above my power
Seemed other, greater potencies to stretch—

Valence. For you?

The Duchess. It was not I moved there, I think : 255
But one I could,—though constantly beside,
And aye approaching,—still keep distant from,
And so adore. 'T was a man moved there.

Valence. Who?

The Duchess. I felt the spirit, never saw the face.

Valence. See it ! 'T is Berthold's ! He enables
you 260

To realize your vision.

The Duchess. Berthold?

Valence. Duke—

Emperor to be : he proffers you his hand.

The Duchess. Generous and princely !

Valence. He is all of this.

The Duchess. Thanks, Berthold, for my father's
sake ! No hand

Degrades me.

Valence. You accept the proffered hand ? 265

The Duchess. That he should love me !

Valence. "Loved" I did not say.

Had that been—love might so incline the Prince
To the world's good, the world that 's at his foot,—
I do not know, this moment, I should dare
Desire that you refused the world—and Cleves— 270
The sacrifice he asks.

The Duchess. Not love me, sir ?

Valence. He scarce affirmed it.

The Duchess. May not deeds affirm ?

Valence. What does he ? . . . Yes, yes, very
much he does !

All the shame saved, he thinks, and sorrow saved—
Immitigable sorrow, so he thinks,— 275

Sorrow that 's deeper than we dream, perchance.

The Duchess. Is not this love?

Valence. So very much he does!

For look, you can descend now gracefully:
All doubts are banished, that the world might
have,

Or worst, the doubts yourself, in after-time, 280
May call up of your heart's sincereness now.

To such, reply, "I could have kept my rule—

"Increased it to the utmost of my dreams—

"Yet I abjured it." This, he does for you:

It is munificently much.

The Duchess. Still "much!" 285

But why is it not love, sir? Answer me!

Valence. Because not one of Berthold's words
and looks

Had gone with love's presentment of a flower

To the beloved: because bold confidence,

Open superiority, free pride— 290

Love owns not, yet were all that Berthold owned:

Because where reason, even, finds no flaw,

Unerringly a lover's instinct may.

The Duchess. You reason, then, and doubt?

Valence. I love, and know.

The Duchess. You love? How strange! I
never cast a thought 295

On that. Just see our selfishness! You seemed

So much my own . . . I had no ground—and yet,

I never dreamed another might divide

My power with you, much less exceed it.

Valence. Lady,

I am yours wholly.

The Duchess. Oh, no, no, not mine! 300

'T is not the same now, never more can be.

—Your first love, doubtless. Well, what's gone
from me?

What have I lost in you?

Valence.

My heart replies—

No loss there ! So, to Berthold back again :

This offer of his hand, he bids me make—

305

Its obvious magnitude is well to weigh.

The Duchess. She's . . . yes, she must be very fair for you !*Valence.* I am a simple advocate of Cleves.*The Duchess.* You ! With the heart and brain that so helped me,

I fancied them exclusively my own,

310

Yet find are subject to a stronger sway !

She must be . . . tell me, is she very fair ?

Valence. Most fair, beyond conception or belief.*The Duchess.* Black eyes?—no matter ! Colombe, the world leads

Its life without you, whom your friends professed 315

The only woman : see how true they spoke !

One lived this while, who never saw your face,

Nor heard your voice—unless . . . Is she from Cleves ?

Valence. Cleves knows her well.*The Duchess.* Ah—just a fancy, now !

When you poured forth the wrongs of Cleves,—I said,

320

—Thought, that is, afterward . . .

Valence. You thought of me ?*The Duchess.* Of whom else ? Only such great cause, I thought,

For such effect : see what true love can do !

Cleves is his love. I almost fear to ask

. . . And will not. This is idling : to our work ! 325

Admit before the Prince, without reserve,

My claims misgrounded ; then may follow better

. . . When you poured out Cleves' wrongs impetuously,

Was she in your mind ?

Valence. All done was done for her
 —To humble me !
The Duchess. She will be proud at least. 330
Valence. She ?
The Duchess. When you tell her.
Valence. That will never be.
The Duchess. How—are there sweeter things
 you hope to tell ?
 No, sir ! You counselled me,—I counsel you
 In the one point I—any woman—can.
 Your worth, the first thing ; let her own come
 next— 335
 Say what you did through her, and she through
 you—
 The praises of her beauty afterward !
 Will you ?
Valence. I dare not.
The Duchess. Dare not ?
Valence. She I love
 Suspects not such a love in me.
The Duchess. You jest.
Valence. The lady is above me and away. 340
 Not only the brave form, and the bright mind,
 And the great heart, combine to press me low—
 But all the world calls rank divides us.
The Duchess. Rank !
 Now grant me patience ! Here 's a man declares
 Oracularly in another's case— 345
 Sees the true value and the false, for them—
 Nay, bids them see it, and they straight do see.
 You called my court's love worthless—so it turned :
 I threw away as dross my heap of wealth,
 And here you stickle for a piece or two ! 350
 First—has she seen you ?
Valence. Yes.
The Duchess. She loves you, then.

ACT IV COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Valence. One flash of hope burst; then succeeded
night :

And all 's at darkest now. Impossible !

The Duchess. We 'll try : you are—so to speak
—my subject yet ?

Valence. As ever—to the death.

The Duchess. Obey me, then ! 355

Valence. I must.

The Duchess. Approach her, and . . . no ! first
of all

Get more assurance. “My instructress,” say,
“Was great, descended from a line of kings,
“And even fair”—(wait why I say this folly)—
“She said, of all men, none for eloquence, 360
“Courage, and (what cast even these to shade)
“The heart they sprung from,—none deserved
like him

“Who saved her at her need : if she said this,
“What should not one I love, say ?”

Valence. Heaven—this hope—

Oh, lady, you are filling me with fire ! 365

The Duchess. Say this !—nor think I bid you
cast aside

One touch of all the awe and reverence ;
Nay, make her proud for once to heart's content
That all this wealth of heart and soul 's her own !
Think you are all of this,—and, thinking it, 370
. . . (Obey !)

Valence. I cannot choose.

The Duchess. Then, kneel to her !

[*VALENCE sinks on his knee.*]

I dream !

Valence. Have mercy ! Yours, unto the death,—
I have obeyed. Despise, and let me die !

The Duchess. Alas, sir, is it to be ever thus ?
Even with you as with the world ? I know 375

This morning's service was no vulgar deed
 Whose motive, once it dares avow itself,
 Explains all done and infinitely more,
 So, takes the shelter of a nobler cause.
 Your service named its true source,—loyalty ! 380
 The rest 's unsaid again. The Duchess bids you,
 Rise, sir ! The Prince's words were in debate.

Valence [*rising*]. Rise ? Truth, as ever, lady,
 comes from you !

I should rise—I who spoke for Cleves, can speak
 For Man—yet tremble now, who stood firm then. 385
 I laughed—for 't was past tears—that Cleves
 should starve

With all hearts beating loud the infamy,
 And no tongue daring trust as much to air :
 Yet here, where all hearts speak, shall I be
 mute ?

Oh, lady, for your own sake look on me ! 390
 On all I am, and have, and do—heart, brain,
 Body and soul,—this Valence and his gifts !
 I was proud once : I saw you, and they sank,
 So that each, magnified a thousand times,
 Were nothing to you—but such nothingness, 395
 Would a crown gild it, or a sceptre prop,
 A treasure speed, a laurel-wreath enhance ?
 What is my own desert ? But should your love
 Have . . . there 's no language helps here . . .
 singled me,—

Then—oh, that wild word “then !”—be just to love, 400
 In generosity its attribute !

Love, since you pleased to love ! All 's cleared
 —a stage

For trial of the question kept so long :
 Judge you—Is love or vanity the best ?
 You, solve it for the world's sake—you, speak first 405
 What all will shout one day—you, vindicate

Our earth and be its angel ! All is said.

Lady, I offer nothing—I am yours :

But, for the cause' sake, look on me and him,
And speak !

The Duchess. I have received the Prince's
message :

410

Say, I prepare my answer !

Valence.

Take me, Cleves !

[*He withdraws.*]

The Duchess. Mournful—that nothing 's what
it calls itself !

Devotion, zeal, faith, loyalty—mere love !

And, love in question, what may Berthold's be ?

I did ill to mistrust the world so soon :

415

Already was this Berthold at my side.

The valley-level has its hawks no doubt :

May not the rock-top have its eagles, too ?

Yet Valence . . . let me see his rival then !

ACT V COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Berthold.

Not so—or, if so—

Why not confess at once that I advise
 None of our kingly craft and guild just now
 To lay, one moment, down their privilege 25
 With the notion they can any time at pleasure
 Retake it : that may turn out hazardous.
 We seem, in Europe, pretty well at end
 O' the night, with our great masque : those
 favoured few

Who keep the chamber's top, and honour's chance 30
 Of the early evening, may retain their place
 And figure as they list till out of breath.

But it is growing late : and I observe
 A dim grim kind of tipstaves at the doorway
 Not only bar new-comers entering now, 35
 But caution those who left, for any cause,
 And would return, that morning draws too near ;
 The ball must die off, shut itself up. We—
 I think, may dance lights out and sunshine in,
 And sleep off headache on our frippery : 40
 But friend the other, who cunningly stole out,
 And, after breathing the fresh air outside,
 Means to re-enter with a new costume,
 Will be advised go back to bed, I fear.
 I stick to privilege, on second thoughts. 45

Melchior. Yes—you evade the adventure : and,
 beside,

Give yourself out for colder than you are.
 King Philip, only, notes the lady's eyes ?
 Don't they come in for somewhat of the motive
 With you too ?

Berthold. Yes—no : I am past that now. 50

Gone 't is : I cannot shut my soul to fact.
 Of course, I might by forethought and contrivance
 Reason myself into a rapture. Gone :
 And something better come instead, no doubt.

Melchior. So be it! Yet, all the same, proceed
my way, 55
Though to your ends; so shall you prosper best!
The lady,—to be won for selfish ends,—
Will be won easier my unselfish . . . call it,
Romantic way.

Berthold. Won easier?

Melchior. Will not she?

Berthold. There I profess humility without
bound : 60
Ill cannot speed—not I—the Emperor.

Melchior. And I should think the Emperor best
waived,

From your description of her mood and way.
You could look, if it pleased you, into hearts;
But are too indolent and fond of watching 65
Your own—you know that, for you study it.

Berthold. Had you but seen the orator her friend,
So bold and voluble an hour before,
Abashed to earth at aspect of the change!
Make her an Empress? Ah, that changed the
case! 70

Oh, I read hearts! 'T is for my own behoof,
I court her with my true worth: wait the event!
I learned my final lesson on that head
When years ago,—my first and last essay—
Before the priest my uncle could by help 75
Of his superior, raise me from the dirt—
Priscilla left me for a Brabant lord
Whose cheek was like the topaz on his thumb.
I am past illusion on that score.

Melchior. Here comes
The lady—

Berthold. And there you go. But do not! Give
me 80
Another chance to please you! Hear me plead!

ACT V COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY

Melchior. You'll keep, then, to the lover, to the man?

Enter the DUCHESS—followed by ADOLF and SABYNE and, after an interval, by the Courtiers

Berthold. Good auspice to our meeting!

The Duchess. May it prove!

—And you, sir, will be Emperor one day?

Berthold. (Ay, that 's the point!) I may be Emperor.

The Duchess. 'T is not for my sake only, I am proud

Of this you offer: I am prouder far
That from the highest state should duly spring
The highest, since most generous, of deeds.

Berthold. (Generous—still that!) You under-
rate yourself.

You are, what I, to be complete, must gain—
Find now, and may not find, another time.
While I career on all the world for stage,
There needs at home my representative.

The Duchess. —Such, rather, would some
warrior-woman be—

One dowered with lands and gold, or rich in
friends—

One like yourself.

Berthold. Lady, I am myself,

And have all these: I want what 's not myself,
Nor has all these. Why give one hand two swords?
Here 's one already: be a friend's next gift
A silk glove, if you will—I have a sword.

The Duchess. You love me, then?

Berthold. Your lineage I revere,

Honour your virtue, in your truth believe,
Do homage to your intellect, and bow
Before your peerless beauty.

The Duchess.

But, for love—

105

Berthold. A further love I do not understand.

Our best course is to say these hideous truths,
And see them, once said, grow endurable :
Like waters shuddering from their central bed,
Black with the midnight bowels of the earth,
That, once up-spouted by an earthquake's throe,
A portent and a terror—soon subside,
Freshen apace, take gold and rainbow hues
In sunshine, sleep in shadow, and at last
Grow common to the earth as hills or trees—
Accepted by all things they came to scare.

110

115

The Duchess. You cannot love, then?

Berthold. —Charlemagne, perhaps!

Are you not over-curious in love-lore?

The Duchess. I have become so, very recently.
It seems, then, I shall best deserve esteem,
Respect, and all your candour promises,
By putting on a calculating mood—
Asking the terms of my becoming yours?

120

Berthold. Let me not do myself injustice, neither.
Because I will not condescend to fictions
That promise what my soul can ne'er acquit,
It does not follow that my guarded phrase
May not include far more of what you seek,
Than wide profession of less scrupulous men.
You will be Empress, once for all : with me
The Pope disputes supremacy—you stand,
And none gainsays, the earth's first woman.

125

130

The Duchess.

That—

Or simple Lady of Ravestein again?

Berthold. The matter's not in my arbitrament :
Now I have made my claims—which I regret—
Cede one, cede all.

135

The Duchess. This claim then, you enforce?

Berthold. The world looks on.

The Duchess. And when must I decide?

Berthold. When, lady? Have I said thus much
so promptly

For nothing?—Poured out, with such pains, at once
What I might else have suffered to ooze forth 140

Droplet by droplet in a lifetime long—

For aught less than as prompt an answer, too?

All's fairly told now: who can teach you more?

The Duchess. I do not see him.

Berthold. I shall ne'er deceive.

This offer should be made befittingly 145

Did time allow the better setting forth

The good of it, with what is not so good,

Advantage, and disparagement as well:

But as it is, the sum of both must serve.

I am already weary of this place; 150

My thoughts are next stage on to Rome. Decide!

The Empire—or,—not even Juliers now!

Hail to the Empress—farewell to the Duchess!

[*The Courtiers, who have been drawing nearer
and nearer, interpose.*]

Gaucelme. —“Farewell,” Prince? when we break
in at our risk—

Clugnet. Almost upon court-licence trespassing— 155

Gaucelme. —To point out how your claims are
valid yet!

You know not, by the Duke her father's will,

The lady, if she weds beneath her rank,

Forfeits her Duchy in the next heir's favour—

So 't is expressly stipulate. And if 160

It can be shown 't is her intent to wed

A subject, then yourself, next heir, by right

Succeed to Juliers.

Berthold. What insanity?—

Guibert. Sir, there's one Valence, the pale fiery
man

You saw and heard this morning—thought, no
doubt, 165

Was of considerable standing here :
I put it to your penetration, Prince,
If aught save love, the truest love for her
Could make him serve the lady as he did !
He 's simply a poor advocate of Cleves 170
—Creeps here with difficulty, finds a place
With danger, gets in by a miracle,
And for the first time meets the lady's face—
So runs the story : is that credible ?

For, first—no sooner in, than he 's apprised 175
Fortunes have changed ; you are all-powerful here,
The lady as powerless : he stands fast by her !

The Duchess [aside]. And do such deeds spring
up from love alone ?

Guibert. But here occurs the question, does the
lady

Love him again ? I say, how else can she ? 180
Can she forget how he stood singly forth
In her defence, dared outrage all of us,
Insult yourself—for what, save love's reward ?

The Duchess [aside]. And is love then the sole
reward of love ?

Guibert. But, love him as she may and must—
you ask, 185

Means she to wed him ? “Yes,” both natures
answer !

Both, in their pride, point out the sole result ;
Nought less would he accept nor she propose.
For each conjecture was she great enough
—Will be, for this.

Clugnet. Though, now that this is known, 190
Policy, doubtless, urges she deny . . .

The Duchess. —What, sir, and wherefore ?—
since I am not sure

That all is any other than you say !

You take this Valence, hold him close to me,
Him with his actions : can I choose but look ?

I am not sure, love trulier shows itself
Than in this man, you hate and would degrade,
Yet, with your worst abatement, show me thus.
Nor am I—(thus made look within myself,
Ere I had dared)—now that the look is dared—
Sure that I do not love him!

Guibert.

Hear you, Prince?

Berthold. And what, sirs, please you, may this prattle mean

Unless to prove with what alacrity

You give your lady's secrets to the world?
How much indebted, for discovering

That quality, you make me, will be found
When there 's a keeper for my own to seek.

Courtiers. "Our lady?"

Berthold. —She assuredly remains.

The Duchess. Ah, Prince—and you too can be generous?

You could renounce your power, if this were so, 210

And let me, as these phrase it, wed my love

Yet keep my Duchy? You perhaps exceed

Him, even, in disinterestedness !

Berthold. How, lady, should all this affect my purpose?

Your will and choice are still as ever, free. 215

Say, you have known a worthier than myself

In mind and heart, of happier form and face—

Others must have their birthright : I have gifts,

To balance theirs, not blot them out of sight.

Against a hundred alien qualities,

I lay the prize I offer. I am nothing:

Wed you the Empire?

The Duchess.

And my heart away?



Berthold. When have I made pretension to your heart?

I give none. I shall keep your honour safe ;
 With mine I trust you, as the sculptor trusts 225
 Yon marble woman with the marble rose,
 Loose on her hand, she never will let fall,
 In graceful, slight, silent security.
 You will be proud of my world-wide career,
 And I content in you the fair and good. 230
 What were the use of planting a few seeds
 The thankless climate never would mature—
 Affections all repelled by circumstance ?
 Enough: to these no credit I attach,—
 To what you own, find nothing to object. 235
 Write simply on my requisition's face
 What shall content my friends—that you admit,
 As Colombe of Ravestein, the claims therein,
 Or never need admit them, as my wife—
 And either way, all 's ended !

The Duchess. Let all end ! 240

Berthold. The requisition !

Guibert. —Valence holds, of course !

Berthold. Desire his presence ! [*ADOLF goes out.*]

Courtiers [to each other]. Out it all comes yet ;
 He 'll have his word against the bargain yet ;
 He 's not the man to tamely acquiesce.
 One passionate appeal—upbraiding even, 245
 May turn the tide again. Despair not yet !

[*They retire a little.*]

Berthold [to MELCHIOR]. The Empire has its old success, my friend !

Melchior. You 've had your way: before the spokesman speaks,

Let me, but this once, work a problem out,
 And ever more be dumb ! The Empire wins ? 250
 To better purpose have I read my books !

Enter VALENCE

Melchior [to the Courtiers]. Apart, my masters!

[To VALENCE.] Sir, one word with you!

I am a poor dependant of the Prince's—

Pitched on to speak, as of slight consequence.

You are no higher, I find : in other words, 255

We two, as probably the wisest here,

Need not hold diplomatic talk like fools.

Suppose I speak, divesting the plain fact

Of all their tortuous phrases, fit for them?

Do you reply so, and what trouble saved ! 260

The Prince, then—an embroiled strange heap of
news

This moment reaches him—if true or false,

All dignity forbids he should inquire

In person, or by worthier deputy ;

Yet somehow must inquire, lest slander come : 265

And so, 't is I am pitched on. You have heard

His offer to your lady?

Valence.

Yes.

Melchior.

—Conceive

Her joy thereat?

Valence.

I cannot.

Melchior.

No one can.

All draws to a conclusion, therefore.

Valence [aside].

So !

No after-judgment—no first thought revised— 270

Her first and last decision !—me, she leaves,

Takes him ; a simple heart is flung aside,

The ermine o'er a heartless breast embraced.

Oh Heaven, this mockery has been played too
oft !

Once, to surprise the angels—twice, that fiends 275

Recording, might be proud they chose not so—

Thrice, many thousand times, to teach the world

All men should pause, misdoubt their strength,
 since men
 Can have such chance yet fail so signally,
 —But ever, ever this farewell to Heaven, 280
 Welcome to earth—this taking death for life—
 This spurning love and kneeling to the world—
 Oh Heaven, it is too often and too old!

Melchior. Well, on this point, what but an absurd
 rumour

Arises—these, its source—its subject, you ! 285
 Your faith and loyalty misconstruing,
 They say, your service claims the lady's hand !
 Of course, nor Prince nor lady can respond :
 Yet something must be said : for, were it true
 You made such claim, the Prince would . . .

Valence. Well, sir,—would ? 290

Melchior. —Not only probably withdraw his suit,
 But, very like, the lady might be forced
 Accept your own. Oh, there are reasons why !
 But you 'll excuse at present all save one,—
 I think so. What we want is, your own witness, 295
 For, or against—her good, or yours : decide !

Valence. [*aside*]. Be it her good if she accounts
 it so !

[*After a contest.*] For what am I but hers, to choose
 as she ?

Who knows how far, beside, the light from her
 May reach, and dwell with, what she looks upon ? 300

Melchior [*to the Prince*]. Now to him, you !

Berthold [*to VALENCE*]. My friend acquaints
 you, sir,

The noise runs . . .

Valence. —Prince, how fortunate are you,
 Wedding her as you will, in spite of noise,
 To show belief in love ! Let her but love you,
 All else you disregard ! What else can be ? 305

For love of you, he would not serve you now
The vulgar way,—repulse your enemies,
Win you new realms, or best, to save the old 335
Die blissfully—that 's past so long ago!

He wishes you no need, thought, care of him—
Your good, by any means, himself unseen,
Away, forgotten!—He gives that life's task up,
As it were . . . but this charge which I return— 340

[Offers the requisition, which she takes.]

Wishing your good.

The Duchess *[having subscribed it]*. And opportunely, sir—

Since at a birthday's close, like this of mine,
Good wishes gentle deeds reciprocate.
Most on a wedding-day, as mine is too,
Should gifts be thought of: yours comes first by
right. 345

Ask of me!

Berthold. He shall have whate'er he asks,
For your sake and his own.

Valence *[aside]*. If I should ask—
The withered bunch of flowers she wears—perhaps,
One last touch of her hand, I never more
Shall see!

[After a pause, presenting his paper to the Prince.]

Cleves' Prince, redress the wrongs of Cleves! 350

Berthold. I will, sir!

The Duchess *[as VALENCE prepares to retire]*.

—Nay, do out your duty, first!

You bore this paper; I have registered
My answer to it: read it and have done!

[VALENCE reads it.]

I take him—give up Juliers and the world.
This is my Birthday.

Melchior.

Berthold, my one hero 355

Of the world she gives up, one friend worth my
books,

Sole man I think it pays the pains to watch,—
Speak, for I know you through your Popes and
Kings!

Berthold [after a pause]. Lady, well rewarded!
Sir, as well deserved!

I could not imitate—I hardly envy— 360

I do admire you. All is for the best.

Too costly a flower were this, I see it now,

To pluck and set upon my barren helm

To wither—any garish plume will do.

I'll not insult you and refuse your Duchy— 365

You can so well afford to yield it me,

And I were left, without it, sadly lorn.

As it is—for me—if that will flatter you,

A somewhat wearier life seems to remain

Than I thought possible where . . . 'faith, their
life 370

Begins already! They're too occupied

To listen: and few words content me best.

[*Abruptly to the Courtiers.*] I am your Duke,
though! Who obey me here?

The Duchess. Adolf and Sabyne follow us—

Guibert [starting from the Courtiers]. —And I?

Do I not follow them, if I may n't you? 375

Shall not I get some little duties up

At Ravestein and emulate the rest?

God save you, Gaucelme! 'T is my Birthday, too!

Berthold. You happy handful that remain with me
. . . That is, with Dietrich the black Barnabite 380

I shall leave over you—will earn your wages

Or Dietrich has forgot to ply his trade!

Meantime,—go copy me the precedents

Of every installation, proper styles

And pedigrees of all your Juliers' Dukes— 385

COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY ACT V

While I prepare to plod on my old way,
And somewhat wearily, I must confess!

The Duchess [with a light joyous laugh as she turns
from them]. Come, Valence, to our friends,
God's earth . . .

Valence [as she falls into his arms]. —And thee!

END OF VOL. II